

3 Vols



Maynard





# FATHER GODFREY.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“ANNE DYSART,” “ARTHUR,”

&c., &c.

‘ La religion, la société, la nature, telles sont les trois luttes de l’homme.’

*Les Travailleurs de Mer.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# FATHER GODFREY.

## CHAPTER I.

### ST. FRIDESWIDE.

ON a certain evening, early in the month of June, two young men were strolling together in the walks known in Oxford as Christchurch Meadows.

The evening was fine, but its beauty was of a solemn cast. A stillness, almost like the stillness which precedes a storm, filled the air. In the west, a wide tract of dusky red cloud set the sky ablaze, like some vast conflagration. The tree-tops glowed as with the light of torches, and each tower and

battlement was either crested with fire, or stood out in purple gloom from the crimson background.

Neither of the two young men was speaking. Perhaps it might have been the aspect of the scene, perhaps it might have been the fact that this was their last quiet walk together before the close of their University career, which made them both so thoughtful. At last, the one who looked the elder of the two said,

“What a beautiful night!”

“Splendid! How dark it is under the trees! I declare it makes me feel as if I durst only speak in a whisper. I am glad I have seen the old place looking like this.”

“It is very fine,” said the other; but he spoke absently.

“It does not look real at all. It is like some dream of the Middle Ages, before everything got so commonplace. Godfrey,

I feel as if it would not in the least surprise me to meet old Wolsey himself—scarlet hat and all—this very minute. I declare it would seem quite natural. What a magnificent fellow he was! One feels so sorry for him. Mediæval times, with all their colour and mystery, went out with him in a flash of splendour; and in came acts of Parliament, Thirty-nine Articles, and all the daylight and prose of modern life!”

His companion listened attentively enough to this rhapsody, but only said, by way of rejoinder:

“I hope you may have as fine an evening for the boats to-morrow.”

“I should not like an evening like this. It would not be at all the sort of thing. I want something more sparkling and breezy. One doesn’t want to dance to a Psalm tune.”

Wynford’s was an honest English face, fresh, and full yet of the glow and candour of

boyhood ; quick to reflect the impressions of passing objects ; and like a boy's, too, in a certain absence of thought, which yet seemed by no means an absence of the power of thinking.

In Godfrey's countenance there was more of the determined character of manhood. He looked much older than his companion, but in reality there was only a few months difference in their ages. Complexion might have had something to do with it. Wynford's was of that ideal Anglo-Saxon type celebrated ever since the days when the blue-eyed children of the isles were pronounced, in their captivity, to be not Angles, but Angels ; though what authority we possess for ascribing invariably blue eyes to these supernal messengers, it might be difficult to discover. Godfrey, on the contrary, was dark-eyed and dark-haired, not especially swarthy or pale, but without bloom or variety of colouring. Both were

well-looking; the one face had the charm of variety, the other the piquancy of an unsolved secret.

They were now on the path by the river, and were talking of the approaching commemoration. All at once Wynford exclaimed,

“What a pretty girl!”

“Where? I did not notice.”

“Not notice! The very prettiest girl I ever saw in my life. The one on the left hand of the three persons who have just passed.”

“Did anybody pass us? I was hardly aware of it.”

“How very provoking you should not have seen her!”

“Provoking! Not at all. Very few women are really beautiful, and those who are, are never as pretty as the faces one sees in pictures.”

“But this face was, I assure you—indeed

it was of one of the faces in the pictures of these old-master fellows it reminded me—such eyes, and the hair bright, as if the sun shone on it.”

“Perhaps it did—or that red cloud, at least.”

“Let us go round again, and try to meet her. I must convince you that I know geese from swans !”

“Let us go then, if you are not afraid of dispelling a pleasant illusion. We shall not have the advantage of the red light on the hair, for it is going fast.”

Eager and piqued, Wynford hurried his friend round the walks ; but no lady at all answering to the description he had given was to be seen anywhere. At last he said, as if clutching at a forlorn hope,

“Perhaps she may be at the Procession of Boats to-morrow evening.”

There was a mischievous look in Godfrey’s



eyes, yet far from an unkind one, as he answered, condolingly,

“No doubt she will, if she is not a phantom or an apparition, perhaps, of St. Frideswide herself!”

“Nonsense! I tell you it was a real girl of flesh and blood!”

“But you said she looked like a saint or a Madonna!”

“Only her face. She was dressed like other girls,” Wynford said, somewhat crossly.

Godfrey now laughed outright.

“Then you may depend upon it you will see her to-morrow night; and what is equally gratifying, she will see you—the stroke of the victorious boat, the hero of the scene!”

“Sneer as you like, Godfrey. I am glad I have not pored over musty books till I am blind to everything but Greek characters and mathematical diagrams.”

“I am not sneering, my good fellow; but

you see, however it may suit you, it would not do for me to behold an angel in the possessor of every pretty face that comes across me."

"Upon my word, I don't see it. Of course you are booked for a fellowship. And then comes the Rectory, unless you go out in the pedagogic line—that is the fashion for clever fellows now, I suppose?—then the Bishopric. You must have a handsome, dignified woman to do the honours of the palace. I hope, my Lord—" But Wynford stopped suddenly, struck by the expression of annoyance, almost amounting to pain, in his friend's face. "Come, don't be down-hearted, old fellow. After such a splendid double-first, how could you fail?—of the fellowship, I mean."

Godfrey smiled, but hardly naturally, and turned the conversation from himself upon Wynford.

“It is a shame you did not take a first too. You got your second with so little trouble that if you had only read a little more——”

“If I had, I should never have been the stroke of the boat. Had it not been for you, I should not have gone in for honours at all. I am astonished now, when I think how hard I read ; but a man does not like to make a fool of himself.”

“Then why did not you try for the prize poem ? You write very respectable verses. I don’t know whether your ideas are original, but they are poetical. I believe you would have got it.”

“Perhaps I should ; but, you see, I was born with the silver spoon in my mouth, and the consequence is, when you are in lawn sleeves, testifying against all sorts of heresies and isms, on the right hand and on the left, I shall be cantering home with

the fox's brush, or inspecting the hoeing of my turnips at Thorleigh."

"Have you no ambition, Wynford?"

"Not much, I am afraid. I feel very jolly as I am. It is not a sin to be contented, is it?"

Instead of making any answer, Frederick Godfrey fell into a brown study, and they walked back to their college in silence.

"How cold and grey the sky has become!" Godfrey remarked, as they separated to go to their rooms.

Frederick John Godfrey and Leigh Wynford had rooms in the same quadrangle—indeed, on the same staircase—and this propinquity it was which had first given rise to the friendship they had maintained through nearly the whole term of their college life. Godfrey was the eldest son of the late Dean of Marshborough, who had

died a year or two after his preferment to that dignity, leaving a widow and a large family in narrow circumstances. Frederick had already distinguished himself at school, and to enable him to follow out the career so well begun, his mother was obliged to draw upon her small capital, with the understanding that his success was to be made the means of educating the younger members of the family.

On the morning which brought Frederick's letter, announcing briefly the honours he had attained, there was not a happier or a prouder mother in all England than the widow of the Dean of Marshborough. Looking on the blooming group of boys and girls assembled on the tiny lawn behind her cottage, her proud dark eye glistened as she said—

“If your father had only lived to see this day!”

It was not the nature of the Godfrey family to be demonstrative; but perhaps their satisfaction was not the less intense on that account.

In the meantime, the news of the less signal success of Wynford had been received, if not with deeper joy, yet with louder manifestations; and whereas Mrs. Godfrey might have been mortified if her son had taken only a second-class, Mrs. Wynford was elated, carrying at once to the Parsonage, and to every farmhouse and cottage in the village, tidings of the distinction gained by the "young Squire."

The rooms in which the two classmen resided were situated in a small, quiet quadrangle, the rounded battlements and mulioned oriel windows of which bespoke it to have been new when the first James ruled in England. Now it was dark with time and smoke, like the trim grass plat in the

centre, and the ivy which muffled the gateway.

“As dull a little quad as any in Oxford,” Godfrey considered it; to which proposition Wynford indignantly and grandiloquently replied that “it was not dull—that the gloom was merely the shadow of the olden time projecting itself into the common-place life of the present.”

But though Godfrey had called it dull, it was not because he quarrelled with the dullness. He had chosen rooms looking into the quadrangle for the very reason that there would be nothing to disturb his studies. For the same reason, perhaps, his rooms were furnished with extreme plainness. The most striking objects his sitting-room contained were a handsome but long-used writing-table, on which stood, open, a large portable writing-desk, lined with faded green baize, surrounded with tomes of the most learned

aspect ; and an old-fashioned leather arm-chair. A large photograph of Marshborough Cathedral, in an Oxford frame, hung over the mantelpiece, which was further ornamented by sundry other specimens of the same art—most probably family likenesses.

Nothing could have afforded a more striking contrast to this student-like plainness than Wynford's rooms up two pairs of stairs. He had two sitting-rooms, with a door between—the outer furnished like a small library, with a thick, dark carpet, oak bookcase and writing-table, with candlesticks on the mantelpiece of illuminated brass. The inner apartment had much more the aspect of a lady's boudoir than the sanctum of a student. The pretty carpet, the walls adorned with chromo-lithographs of the Arundel Society, the inviting sofa, and the loo-table, ornamented with splendidly-bound books and pretty knick-knacks,



testified to the taste as well as to the somewhat luxurious habits of the inmate. As he came in now, he threw himself lazily on the sofa, apparently in a thoughtful mood. But noticing ere long that the moon was rising, he drew an easy-chair into the window, to watch it, like a romantic youth as he was—in this age of science and comic papers somewhat of a phenomenon—or, perhaps he was an instance of a reversion to a former type.

Wynford's window did not look into the quadrangle, but into the college gardens, which were among the finest in Oxford. Here, as the shadows of the weeping birches swept the lawns in the whitening moonlight, and the night breeze whispered among the leaves hints of beauty unutterable, the thoughts of the young man not unnaturally wandered away to the face which had reminded him of those visions of saintly

loveliness which look out from the canvas of the great masters of Christian art. He seemed fast falling into a mental rhapsody, which might have betrayed him even into the perpetration of a poem on the supposed vision of St. Frideswide, or other contribution to the all-devouring sepulchre of the dust-bin, had the remembrance fortunately not been associated in his mind with the scepticism and "chaff" of his friend. The wholesome indignation thus aroused turned his thoughts in another direction, and the poem on St. Frideswide is yet, like the productions of the "mute, inglorious Miltons," in the limbo of the great unwritten.

Godfrey sat down likewise when he returned to his rooms; but not in the window; for though Wynford would have had half an hour's entire satisfaction in the mere contemplation of the "ebon and ivory" into which moonlight and shadow had divided

the quadrangle, either Godfrey was not so much alive to the commoner touches of beauty, or his deeper passions were too strongly stirred to admit of the *abandon* necessary to that enjoyment.

He seated himself in the leather arm-chair, in an attitude of extreme weariness. After a time, he started up and began to pace about the room in apparent agitation. When at last he seated himself again, it was to bury his face in his hands, and a fine ear might have been able to distinguish a groan.

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## CHAPTER II.

## ON THE THRESHOLD.

ST. FRIDESWIDE, as Godfrey persisted in calling the unknown beauty, was not to be seen at the Procession of Boats, much to the disappointment of Wynford, to whom it had now become a point of honour to make Godfrey confess that he had not exaggerated her charms.

The two friends accompanied one another to the theatre, to see the honorary degrees conferred. It was a Grand Commemoration, and there were many attractions in the shape of eminent men, distinguished foreigners, Royal personages, and other lions of the

loudest roar. The building was even more than usually crowded.

The black mass of M.A.'s in the area, with their iron-grey locks and middle-aged faces, the somewhat pompous semi-circle of doctors in crimson and black, the "gay bevy" of ladies, as the newspapers delight to describe an assemblage of women, in tiers of seats rising immediately behind them, and, above all, the sea of young faces in the galleries, form a sort of classified picture of the upper classes of society, which in its way is unique. But is all this not annually described by the "own correspondents," of every paper, of every hue in religion and politics?

Every now and then, as the somewhat demonstrative England of the future, which had not yet, however, reached the climax of the "red tie," gave way to some more than usually explosive criticism, the faces of the "Dons" below were upturned towards it,

some in reproof, some in a half-melancholy, half-amused sympathy. For those time-worn faces were the very faces that once filled these same galleries; and the countenances to which seriousness seemed now an impossibility, would look as grave and as furrowed to a not distant generation.

*“Tempora mutantur, et nos mutamur in illis.”*

The Crewian oration was made, the “Newdegate” was read, both in that mumbling, utterly incomprehensible tone with which English schoolboys and University men think it necessary to avoid the indelible disgrace of “spouting.”

“That ought to have been yours, Wynford,” Godfrey whispered.

But Wynford, instead of answering, exclaimed, with sudden animation :

“She is here !—just opposite, second row from the front, next but one to the pillar. Now?”

The "now" with which he concluded was both interrogative and triumphant. Godfrey turned an amused countenance in the direction indicated, and then said :

"Well, you are right—she is beautiful!"

"I knew you would say so, though you are as hard as a flint, and as cold as steel."

"I hope you are not as happy in your description of me as of St. Frideswide, whom I suppose I must not call St. Frideswide any longer, now that she has returned to the world of flesh and blood. But really you hit her off to a T."

And with critical eye he began to examine her, as if she were a picture. She looked about eighteen or nineteen, and her beauty might fairly enough have furnished an excuse for a young man's rhapsody, if young men, that is to say, were in the habit of indulging in rhapsodies. But the affectation of the present day lies all in a contrary

direction. Wynford, however, was not affected. His home education, and the admiration which had waited on him from infancy, had saved him from that vice at least.

“Exactly the face of a mediæval angel,” said Godfrey. “I wonder, if one were to know her, how far from angelic she would turn out? I wonder if she pushes about her little brothers and sisters, and rates her maid when she does not succeed in producing that turn of her cocoon-coloured hair which has such a becoming and un-studied effect?”

“I tell you, man, that girl does nothing for effect; she does not look like it. And to call her hair cocoon-coloured!”

“It is cocoon-coloured.”

“It is like threads of sunshine, or as if a glory rested on it!”

Godfrey laughed.



“More poetical, perhaps, but not more correct.”

Wynford made no answer, but turned away in indignation ; and, a popular public character then coming forward to receive his honorary degree, both he and Godfrey were soon joining lustily in the deafening cheer which is a speciality of English youth when it condescends to be enthusiastic. St. Frideswide was not mentioned between them again ; but it did not appear that even Godfrey had forgotten her. When they met in the evening, he proposed that they should look for her.

“What ! though she rates her maid, and pushes about her little brothers and sisters !”

“That does not make her the less beautiful. I admire beautiful pictures and statues, and, *cæteris paribus*, flesh and blood are more beautiful than either. Whether she rates her maid or not, she is equally lovely.”

“Not to me. I could not care even for a picture if I could not fancy its beauty the outcome of the life within.”

“Then with you ’tis ‘ Handsome does that handsome is.’ ”

“No, it is not. I don’t admire lifeless, soulless features ; but I believe

‘ ’Tis the mind that makes the body rich,  
As honour peereth through the meanest habit.’ ”

“That might be all very well in the days of Queen Elizabeth ; but honour does not peer through mean habits now-a-days. Does not Carlyle tell us we are all mere clothes-blocks ? I am not so apt at quotations as you are ; but the actual experience of life, and even of history, is on my side.”

“You believe in the beautiful fiends, then, of Miss Braddon’s novels, for instance ?”

“I don’t believe in human fiends as a rule at all. More of us are like brutes than

fiends—half brutes, half divinities ; and it is very difficult to say where the divinity ends and the brute begins.”

“ You won’t persuade me that you have much of the brute about you, old fellow. I only wish you would not affect that kind of impassive manner, as if you were the hero of a novel of the ‘ Guy Livingstone ’ school—the next thing to a brute, by-the-bye.”

“ I don’t affect it.”

“ But I say you do ; if I were you I would be more original.”

Wynford had not the good fortune to see “ St. Frideswide,” as they continued to call her, again, but Godfrey was luckier ; she was seated opposite to him during the service at New College Chapel, while Wynford was looking for her at a public breakfast. But this was her last appearance.

The “ Grand Commemoration ” was over.

Men were off for the "Long Vacation"—some to read, some to travel, some to loaf about upon croquet lawns and among game-preserves, and some "for good," as it is called. Among these was Leigh Wynford; and whether or not it was for good for him, these pages will in due course show. He had passed through the vestibule with credit, and now stood on the threshold of life—that threshold which, to some, looks like the grim entrance to a penitentiary, necessity and toil beyond, to him looked like a gateway leading to a "lordly pleasure-house."

Godfrey, who was to remain behind his friend, walked with him to the railway-station. Wynford talked all the way—Godfrey was silent.

They were only just in time; for the bell rang as they entered the station. They grasped one another by the hand.

“I tell you what, Godfrey,” said Wynford, speaking fast and excited ; “you have made a man of me. I should have got into that fast set, if it had not been for you—I should have broken their hearts at home. And now they are so ridiculously proud of me! It is all you, Godfrey. You are the best friend and the finest fellow in the world !”

Instead of the semi-sarcastic reply which Wynford probably expected, he was almost startled to see Godfrey gulp, as if with some unusual effort to express himself. But he only wrung Wynford’s hand, and said, “God bless you, old fellow!” The younger man fancied that his friend’s dark eye glistened as he spoke with something over and above its mere natural keenness—a circumstance that so astonished and touched him that the somewhat blurred outline of the city of colleges—a mere suggestive con-

fusion of spires, turrets, and battlements—  
was sketched on the horizon like castles in  
cloud-land, before the responsive mist had  
vanished from his own.

## CHAPTER III.

## SON AND HEIR.

LEIGH WYNFORD was the only son of a country gentleman of good family, fortune, and position. It was not till many years after the marriage of his parents, when they had, with bitter disappointment, abandoned all hope of offspring, that the "son and heir" at last made his appearance. Who shall describe the rejoicings at Thorleigh Court, and on the Thorleigh estate; the barons of beef, the barrels of ale, the blazing of bonfires, the ringing of bells, the dancing and the speechifying, the mirth and the music, and the loud huzzas, and,

above all, the countenance of the Squire himself, which looked as if it could never more be the seat of grief or care!

It was a scene of universal joy, for the Squire was much liked—in many cases, loved by his dependents; and they really shared in his happiness, and were glad, for their own sakes, to look forward to the day when a shoot from the good old stock should reign over them as landlord and master. From which the acute reader cannot fail to perceive that Thorleigh was a very benighted place, where Universal Suffrage and the Ballot Bill were altogether unfamiliar and abhorrent ideas. In fact, those who professed such ideas, together with other immoral persons, would probably have received a strong hint to locate themselves elsewhere.

The Squire was somewhat of an autocrat. He was, however, a benevolent and con-



scientious autocrat. There was not, in all England, a more liberal landlord, or one whose land was in a more flourishing condition. The cottages of the labourers were roomy and comfortable, as well as picturesque. In health they were provided with work; in sickness they were cared for and comforted. From the great house itself went down food and medicine and advice, generally accompanied by Mrs. Wynford herself, the delight of whose existence it was to befriend and patronise and advise every soul in the parish which owned her husband's sway. Supply and demand, non-interference, every-one-for-himself notions had no place at Thorleigh Court, where political economy, even in these days, had made but small advances, and where the very idea of an agricultural strike would have caused little less astonishment than a sudden eruption of fire and lava from the

placid green summit of the Bloomshire Beacon, just visible on the northern horizon. That he was bound to provide for the physical, moral, and religious well-being of his retainers, was the primary article in the Squire's creed ; the secondary and complementary one being that of that well-being he was the best judge. Notions unenlightened and obstructive to such a degree that I am almost afraid to mention them ; yet the Squire had as strong a sense of his duties as of his rights, and perhaps it might not be possible to say so much for all who profess a more enlightened or more fashionable political creed.

No human joy, as we all know, can be pure, more especially parental joy—and the parental joy of those who possess an only “son and heir” is perhaps the most trying form of this kind of happiness. What moments of intense anxiety when “baby cried”

or looked pale, from some cause altogether occult, and unfathomable by the whole conclave of parents, nurses, and doctors ! Or that dreadful day when he was supposed to have broken his arm, or irreparably injured the elbow-joint, his screams were so terrific and his refusal to be touched so vehement ! And then the relief experienced when the doctor pronounced that the whole uproar was the result of a slight blow upon the “funny-bone,” only the learned gentleman called it by a much finer name !

Nor did these sensational occasions decrease. As he grew a bigger boy, and repudiated with scorn the idea of being attended by a train of nurses, it was quite awful to think of the perils presented by walls, and trees, and streams ; for the boy had an enterprising and courageous disposition ; at least if that can be called courage which for the most part is a mere ignorance of,

or unbelief in, danger. The state of chronic anxiety which formed the normal condition of Mr. and Mrs. Wynford's life was only varied by more acute attacks of the same complaint: for instance, what agonies did they not experience when the gardener descried him from afar navigating an ornamental sheet of water in a tub, with a spade for a scull, and already midway across the perilous passage in his unmanageable and unseaworthy vessel! And on another occasion, some year or two subsequent, having fallen into this same pond, with what might have been no worse damage than spoiling his clothes, he laid himself out on the bank to dry in a lump, under the hot July sun, where he was found by his father himself, in a cloud of steam and shivering violently, with every appearance of incipient fever! One may well imagine the night that succeeded at Thorleigh Court. Yet out of that and all other dangers he

issued without permanent injury. And as he grew towards man's estate, and more able, as they supposed, to take care of himself physically, his parents began to breathe. "Now," they said, "we shall enjoy our child, and rest." Poor parents!

But the Wynfords being people with a strong sense of duty, it must not be supposed that the duty of bestowing a suitable education on this precious only son was in any way by them shirked or ignored. Mr. Wynford was a man who thought seriously about education, and who had a very decided creed upon the subject. That people should be educated for the place they were to fill, was his opinion. If a child was to be a Squire, he should be educated to be a good Squire; if a hewer of wood and a drawer of water, then to be a good hewer of wood and drawer of water. The birth and position of the child marked out the education he

ought to receive. His talents and dispositions—the Creator's plan for the future structure—did not count for much in this scheme ; which one can perceive was eminently calculated to produce village Hampdens and mute, inglorious Miltons ; and not at all to foster that universal discontent which makes every man feel that, being as good as another, he has a right to struggle for everything—a result which, though it may lead through natural selection to the improvement of the race, is hardly conducive to the greatest happiness of the greatest number—that is to say, if happiness means enjoyment of our lot.

But to return to Leigh Wynford, and the Latin and Greek, and History and Statesmanship, which were of course necessary for the education of a certain landlord and possible legislator.

Anxious days and sleepless nights did his

parents pass in discussions as to the means of furnishing him with all these advantages, without any drawback whatever. After the balancing of many pros and cons, the idea of a great public school was discarded.

“Raynton tells me,” said Mr. Wynford, “that in these boarding-houses the boys light fires in their trunks to cook their suppers. Leigh might be burnt to death, not to speak of the moral impropriety——”

“And that poor young Belton, that was hit with a cricket-ball in the head, he has never been well since. Only think if darling Leigh——”

As he was not to go to a public school, and as sending him anywhere as a private pupil seemed to possess no advantages over educating him at home, the latter alternative was decided upon ; and a competent tutor, superintended by the Squire himself—he being no contemptible scholar—was engaged

for the momentous task. Leigh Wynford did not take more unkindly to learning than boys in general. Naturally he preferred "Cast up by the Sea," "The Scalp Hunters," and juvenile sensational literature in general, to the Latin Accidence or the Greek Analecta ; and more than either, he delighted in active sports of all kinds. Notwithstanding the danger that might be connected with these, both his father and mother knew too well what was becoming a man and a country gentleman to attempt to discourage him in such tastes and exercises. Indeed, neither of them had any desire to spoil him, in the usual sense of the word. The Squire had very strict notions about training up a child in the way he should go ; and that he should have behaved rudely or spoken haughtily to the servants or dependants, "like a parvenu or a radical," would have been quite a grief to his mother. No, their



aim was that their boy should attain to the highest in mind, morals, and manners; and both of them may be pardoned for fancying that they early began to discern the good effect of their eager cares, and to look forward to the time when they should have nothing to do but to sit down and enjoy their full fruition.

And thus it came to pass that, from the first dawn of consciousness till he had reached the confines of manhood, Leigh Wynford had been accustomed to regard himself as the centre of his world—the one being towards whose instruction, or improvement, or pleasure all things were valued according as they contributed. Parents, servants, arrangements of every kind, he beheld gave way, not to his caprices, certainly, but to his advantage, till goodness made easy became the fixed habit of his mind. That he did not grow up a monster of selfishness, may pro-

bably be attributed to the fact that nature had bestowed upon him an eager, objective mind, which was ever projecting itself outwards, and to which joy was necessarily social. He was very affectionate to his parents and nurses, who, after the manner of the better class of nurses, all doted on the bright-faced, caressing little fellow ; while grooms, gamekeepers, gardeners, cordially believed in the sentiment of the portly old butler, that there was not such another young gentleman as Master Wynford—"no, not in hall Hengland."

So Leigh grew up, unconsciously expecting that all through life everything would give way to him, if he only did what was right and kind. It was so pleasant to be kind, and gratitude and admiration were so pleasant in return ; and a life rose up before his mind's eye, where there would be no opposition, and where he would reign a benefi-

cent prince over all who came near him. I do not say that he was not aware that this would be an exceptional life; but his was, of course, to be an exceptional life—with the young, a common hallucination, which, on the whole, we must not regret.

At last the time came when it was no longer possible to delay his going to Oxford. For himself it was a pleasure—an intense pleasure—all his pleasures were intense. The life, he knew, would be “jolly.” He would not neglect study—no, it would be jolly to be clever, and his father and mother expected it, and he liked books now. The son and the parents parted for the first time in their lives—the latter with heavy hearts, the former with a swelling sensation in his throat, which soon passed away, as bright anticipations and pleasant thoughts filled his mind. “He would be the best of sons and the most suc-

cessful of men, and he was a man now."

At first there seemed little prospect of an intimacy between him and Godfrey. Godfrey, though only a few months older in actual life, was at least ten years his senior in character and purpose. He was already respected as a clever man and a hard reader by the few who knew him, but previous to this friendship with Wynford, he had not been on terms of familiar intimacy with anyone.

It was Wynford's second term. Being a young man of family and fortune, and with that flow of spirits and energy of action which are so attractive, particularly to the young, he soon found plenty of associates, over whom he ruled pretty nearly as he expected. And yet, while he seemed to be the leader, he was virtually led. Boating, swimming, athletic sports, not to mention parties, "wines," and other social entertain-

ments, occupied the greater part of his time. Study was pretty nearly nowhere. He had not meant this, and really did not like it; but the line of life in which he could be first and foremost was too pleasant to be exchanged for that where he fancied he should be nobody and nothing, for Wynford had suddenly become humble about his mental acquirements. So it came to pass that about this time he got mixed up in a scrape, his share in which, though really of a venial nature, might have been attended with unpleasant consequences. The idea of the distress it would cause his parents filled him with pain. Where was he to turn? What was he to do?

In this emergency, partly from his reputation, partly from the accident of his being at hand, he appealed to Godfrey for advice and assistance. Never, perhaps, had the latter been more taken by surprise; but

there was something in the singleness of mind and perfect confidence in his goodwill so unlike anything he would have done himself, which won inexpressibly on the reserved nature of the "reading man." It so happened that he could help him, and he did, effectually. In the fulness of his gratitude, Wynford laid open his heart to Godfrey, and the burden of his thankfulness never ceased to be.

"It would have made them so miserable at home."

"But you will make them miserable yet, if you don't shake off these fellows."

"But how is a fellow to shake them off?"

"Read, and they will fall off. Did not you come here on purpose?"

"I suppose I did; but I have not the brains you have."

"Well, make the best of the brains you have."

When Godfrey gave this advice, he hardly expected it to be taken, or, at least, persevered in. But at last, when he saw that it was, a feeling of respect was added to the somewhat unusual liking he had conceived for the young man, and ere long they became fast friends, being both at the age when friendships are easily made. It is more than probable that it was this new companionship which led to the perseverance above named. That same love of approbation—the rock upon which Wynford had just made shipwreck—served now as the foundation of what seemed to be a fair and promising structure. Not only himself, but Godfrey also, in due time, came to the conclusion that, after all, his brains were by no means to be despised.

“You have more than nine-tenths of the men up. I might say nineteen-twentieths.”

“But most of them are such blockheads!

It is that, rather than that I am clever."

"Are any of us clever, except by comparison? At any rate, you are clever enough to go in for honours."

Thus commanded, Wynford went in for honours, with what success has already been seen. At Thorleigh Court we know it was considered shining, though I will not affirm that the Squire, who had been an Oxford man in his day, might not have had some slight misgiving that, after all, it was not so very wonderful.

"And now," said Mrs. Wynford, "after this day or two at the Foxleys', we shall have him at home, and all to ourselves."

"Yes. We must bring him forward in the county. I trust he will take a place at once."

"And we must keep a good deal more company," said Mrs. Wynford, who, while Leigh was young, had not cared much for



company ; but now she looked forward with delight to introducing her handsome, clever boy. The parents' paradise was about to begin at last.

## CHAPTER IV.

SLOW.

LEIGH WYNFORD was to pay a short visit to an old friend of his father's on his way home. Though it had been long talked of, it was his first visit to Willesmere Court, and, except Colonel Foxley himself, he had not as yet seen any of the family. To speak the truth, he was not without some fear that the expedition might altogether prove "slow." But a few days would soon pass. He had heard that the place was old and interesting, and Wynford was fond of such places. It was not in his nature to be easily "bored." He had a healthy interest

in everybody and everything, and life was yet fresh as an unopened tale.

Willesmere Court was some miles from the railway station, and on leaving the train he was accosted by a man-servant, with a cockade in his hat—not exactly either a coachman or a gardener, but a sort of amphibious animal between the stable-yard and the asparagus-beds, yet well-mannered and stately in his way. His master, he said, had sent the carriage to meet him. “It wor five miles to the Court!”

Wynford could scarcely avoid smiling when he beheld the “carriage.” Such an antiquated-looking conveyance it was, that he felt at once as if he were transported back to the times when ladies, instead of being the shape of a sugar-loaf, or a walking-stick with a top-heavy head, were fashioned somewhat like a salmon extinguished by a coal-scuttle. He rather enjoyed the

sensation, however. He liked anything that had flavour or peculiarity. The carriage was a sort of double gig, and was probably new about the time of the marriage of the Colonel's father. Faded and threadbare was the lining, yet spotlessly clean and well dusted ; and if the harness was clumsy and old-fashioned, and the lackering almost rubbed off, they too had an air of the most scrupulous attention and careful preservation. Then the horse, though plump and well-groomed, was old and asthmatic, and Wynford soon found, as they started on their five miles' journey, that his apprehensions of "slowness," as far, at least, as that was concerned, were certainly not unfounded. But he did not mind—the afternoon and the rich vale through which the road lay were both lovely ; and the always-pathetic fact that he had that day turned the page for ever on one chapter

of life, disposed him to thoughtfulness.

Oh ! how pleasant in the decline of the long June day was the cool shade of the oaks—how yellow the buttercups—how rich the meadows, where the cows lay under the trees, lazily chewing the cud, and switching their tails in the fulness of content—a very cow's paradise !

The slow motion of the Colonel's ancient horse was pleasant and sleepy ; and, half in a dream, Wynford watched the shadows of the Summer clouds on the hills, or listened to the black-cap as he poured out the joy of his paternal heart in a song of triumph over his gaping nestlings—lovely creatures in his eyes, no doubt, though, to the less partial observer, looking wonderfully like four mouths without any bodies.

Wynford's thoughts had that kind of sadness which

“ is not akin to pain,”

but which, on the contrary, those who have never experienced any real pain, cultivate, as a sort of luxury, the soupçon of bitter almond flavouring the cake, and giving character to its sweetness. During the whole drive he did not once think of St. Frideswide. Since Godfrey had acknowledged the fact of her beauty, his enthusiasm had greatly cooled.

The sun was low and dazzling, the shadows were very long, and the trees still, as in a picture, when, turning round a corner, he found himself in the midst of a village—such a village as is seen nowhere out of England. A very common kind of village in England, however, and perhaps all the more beautiful that it is common—just as a familiar violet or primrose has a kind of beauty, which the rarest exotic can never possess. Low brick houses,

standing at all angles, some buried in honeysuckle, some wreathed with vines ; a great yew-tree in the centre of the village green ; a wealth of leafage everywhere ; on a rising ground a new church—such were its salient features. In a sort of unspeakable content the young Oxford man was enjoying the scene, and inhaling the scent of the stocks and pinks and mignonette which lavishly blossomed in the cottage gardens, when, “There be the court, sir,” said the servant, turning round and touching his hat, with the air with which a Chinaman might have introduced “a barbarian” to the palace of the Emperor of Pigtails. “At the fur end of the village, where those trees is ; and you can just see the moat a-shining through them in the sun.”

As they drew nearer, Wynford could hear a low rush as of falling waters,

mingled with the tremulous whisper of aspens. But I will not describe Willesmere Court at the end of a chapter.

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## CHAPTER V.

RES ANGUSTA DOMI.

THE Foxleys were the very oldest family in Bloomshire. Pedigrees are rarely interesting except to those to whom they belong, or I might have told how they were a noble family before the coming of the Conqueror; nay, before the advent of Hengist and Horsa, having in their veins, it was said, the blood of an ancient British knight whose daughter was espoused to a Saxon gentleman. At all events, they had managed in those legendary days to hold their own, better than they did in more modern times; but that might have been, perhaps, because

the race was then in the vigour and vitality of its prime. Races, like kingdoms, like smaller things too—like varieties in the life of the lower animals, like forms in the vegetable world, or may I not say like everything mundane; and does not even the development theory bear me out—have their decline and fall, as well as their rise and progress? The apples which basked on the terrace-walls of our ancestors are unknown to us even by name; and the Peels and the Gladstones have replaced the De Bohuns and De Clares of an earlier day. Through the new blood the old country continues to flourish.

The Foxleys were a relic of past days—like the hollow yew on the village green—not good for the rough uses of manufacture, or the prosaic purposes of being converted into bank-bills in any shape; still good—good for the imagination perhaps, or perhaps good

as a sort of hint that free trade, railways, machinery, universal competition, and every one for himself, though good for us, as guilds, and feudal lords, and monks, and abbeys, and knights-errant, and painfully-wrought illuminated manuscripts might have been good for our forefathers—may possibly not, after all, be the ultimatum of humanity. The Foxleys had lived for generations and generations at Willesmere Court. An old Saxon Grange, it was said, had once occupied the site of the present court, ancient now in its turn. Quaint, and walled, and moated, it had been fortified in Norman times, as the narrow round arched gateway, where the valerian now unfurled its crimson banner among the flowery spears of the wild snapdragon, bore convincing testimony. Yellow stone-crop hid many a ravage in the ruined battlements, and wallflowers sprang from the crevices, burdening the air with

their rich, old-fashioned sweetness. The dwelling-house, which formed the kernel of this shell, was of later date still. Yet the muscular development of the ivy boles twining round the tall chimneys, the richly-blent tints with which Time, that laborious pre-Raphaelite artist, had painted, in infinitesimal lichen and moss, the huge, substantial slates, told as plainly as the gables and the chimneys themselves, that centuries must have elapsed since it was new.

The house was not large, but it was large enough for the Foxleys, whose fortunes were very small—so small that they threatened to fine off by degrees into nothing at all.

The few acres which yet remained to the family were heavily mortgaged, not by any special fault, and certainly by no extravagance, of the present possessor, who had inherited from his fathers a legacy of debt, which went on slowly increasing as (we may

infer from the proverb) the moss gathers round the stone which never rolls ; though, I believe, an altogether better species of moss is there meant. Colonel Foxley's half-pay was nearly all they had to subsist upon, and terribly little it was to "maintain the dignity of a county family." Still even this was achieved in a sort of way, though by what toils and contrivances and self-denials, by what perpetual mortifications and daily martyrdoms, Mrs. Foxley alone knew. Mrs. Foxley had married young, attracted by the Colonel's fine person and gallant manners, having at the time achieved what was considered a triumph over many rivals. In her youth she had been a handsome, bright girl, full of life, and fertile in resources for amusement, and had consequently been a welcome visitor at country houses, and an indispensable guest on all festive occasions.

Now, Mrs. Foxley was a matronly, care-encompassed, though hardly care-worn woman, for she had not been mastered by her cares, but had borne a somewhat depressing destiny bravely, regarding it in the light of that kind of sense which we call "common," and which, though common enough no doubt as a medium through which to regard the affairs of our neighbours, is perhaps much less common in the contemplation of our own.

"Many people are much worse off," thought Mrs. Foxley. "If I were only not quite so poor, and dear Geoffrey had not such old-fashioned notions, and Elfrida had more spirit and was a little handier, I don't see that I should have much to complain of, as the world goes."

Such was the lady who, with her husband and daughter, was seated in the drawing-room at Willesmere Court, on the morning

of Leigh Wynford's expected arrival, talking over the arrangements to be made for the reception of their young guest.

The drawing-room at Willesmere Court was in keeping with the exterior. A long, low-ceiled room, carved and paneled, and which no Foxley of the eighteenth century—that age of architectural vandalism—had fortunately been rich enough to take down, or even to paint over. The dark polished floor was here and there covered by squares of carpeting, antique in pattern, and faded in colour—the present generation being unlikely to advance in any great degree its slow progress towards decay, as it was a command of Mrs. Foxley that none of the household should ever walk upon them, but carefully keep to the slippery paths which lay between these sacred oases of forbidden luxury. A very old dark centre-table, with moveable legs, cross-barred and brack-

eted ; chairs that looked as if they would require an athlete to lift them ; one or two ancient tables and cabinets, set out with old china of the most admirable ugliness ; curiously-wrought faded fans ; and other relics of ancient date—all told the same pathetic tale of family decay and family struggle. It was pleasant to sit at the wide open window in the shady end of that room, and inhale the sweet breath of the country, borne in from hay and honeysuckle and clover ; and equally pleasant to listen to the continuous melody made by the fall of waters or the hum of insects, with the occasional whetting of a scythe, as a sort of surprise movement in the symphony. But of all the three persons seated at that window, Miss Foxley alone looked as if it were possible she might be enjoying the feast which Nature had provided for at least three of the senses.



She was sitting in the deep window-recess, almost hidden by the old curtain of faded blue silk, embroidered by hands which had wrought their last stitch centuries gone by. The pattern consisted of certain ornithological specimens in green and yellow, unknown to modern naturalists, and without a parallel among hitherto discovered fossil remains.

Miss Foxley, too, was embroidering, like her ancestress—something very gorgeous indeed, something in crimson and gold and green. She was not working very diligently; she was frequently looking off her work—at the roses, perhaps, on the little terrace in front, or over the moat at the far-stretching meadows, on which the dews and the shadows of morning were still reposing.

Her mother was seated further in the room, working industriously at some common under-garment. Her needle seemed

to fly, and she rarely looked up as she spoke, though, to judge by her face, the discussion was weighty; in fact, the responsible members of the household had resolved themselves into a committee of ways and means.

“He won’t stay above two or three days, I suppose,” she was saying, and her downcast face assumed a look of calculation. She was arranging in her mind the breakfasts and dinners, so as at once to be abundant, tasteful, and economical; and possibly Mr. Lowe may not have a more puzzling task upon which to exercise his ingenuity.

“He may stay a week, perhaps, my dear. I am sure I shall be glad if he does.”

“So should I be glad, if it were not for the expense,” she answered cheerfully; for, though Mrs. Foxley frequently referred to their poverty, it was not grumblingly.

“One additional cannot make much difference, surely.”

“It is not what he eats, it is what we must have.”

“Let him eat as we eat, and give him a welcome.”

“That would never do, dear. His father has ever so many thousands a year, and no doubt he is accustomed——”

“You forget, my dear, the lad is the son of a gentleman, and not of a successful shop-keeper, who has to inquire what everything costs before he knows whether he likes it or not.”

The Colonel said no more. He had a great regard for his wife, and knew well that she and her management had stood between him and ruin—perhaps the county jail. It was a little weakness on her part to imagine that modern fashions were in any respect desirable, and particularly for a

Foxley. But she was a good wife, and he was bound to bear with her weaknesses. He would, indeed, have liked well, if it had been possible, to have maintained intact the old English hospitality of the palmier days of the family, when no lazy vagabond left the house without food and drink ; when there were daily doles for such as preferred alms to work ; and when the great oak table in the dining-hall groaned under fat haunches and savoury pasties, and sparkled with the unadulterated wines of honester days. As for everything modern and make-believe, his soul abhorred it.

“What !” he said, in answer to a timid suggestion that the table would look very pretty filled up with fruit and flowers, with only a dish at each end. “Have all that foreign, lying nonsense at Willesmere Court—never while I am master!—à la Russe, do they call it? And I should like to

know why an Englishman should imitate these northern barbarians, rather than follow the honest fashions of his own forefathers? Everybody does it!—if everybody are fools, why should I?”

Mrs. Foxley durst urge the matter no further; she merely said, rather dolefully—

“I suppose, too, we must have wax candles?”

“I leave that to you, my dear. The others do want very frequent snuffing, and the odour is not always quite pleasant.”

“That would never do. You don't like these beautiful mineral oil-lamps they have at the Rectory? They are quite safe when well made—have no smell.”

“Like them!—no, indeed. Should I like to have you and Elfrida blown up, or burnt to death? They are worthy of the reckless times which invented them—times which reckon life and limb, and honesty

and truth, as nothing in comparison with hurry, and luxury, and self-indulgence. If you cannot afford to have wax-lights, be content with what you can afford."

Even Colonel Foxley did not like to pronounce again the dreadful word "tallow," for, struggle as he might against the feeling, he did feel there was something derogatory to the dignity of the Foxleys in having the drawing-room lighted up with "mutton-fats," with their long black wicks and cauliflower tops, and general effect of dismalness. His wife perceived the quaver in his tone.

"You know, dear, they make candles now that you cannot tell from wax, at about half the price."

But Colonel Foxley was himself again.

"What! those things that made such a shameless fuss about themselves in the newspapers, and turned out to be candles,

like the old fable of the mountain in labour! Honest goods used to recommend themselves; now puffery has superseded merit. We will have no lies in Willesmere Court, Rose, dear; we have not come so low as that yet," he said sadly.

Mrs. Foxley heaved a sigh, partly of irritation. Her worries were great, and it seemed hard they should be unnecessarily increased. But the Colonel was in the main the kindest of husbands, and some of her annoyance had been worked off in that impatient sigh.

"We must have wax, then; and fortunately, as the days are long, one set will burn all the time he is here. Let me see, how many shall we want? Elfrida!"

The young lady at the magnificent embroidery looked up with a start.

"Mamma!"

"How many shall we want?"

“How many—what? I did not hear, mamma.”

“You were not listening, that is to say,” said poor Mrs. Foxley, ready to cry with vexation, and speaking a little sharply. “You never seem to care to help me, Elfrida.”

Elfrida made no answer, but bent her head over her work, as if to conceal the tears which rose in her great dreamy eyes, blue as sapphires. After a short pause, during which all three kept on looking rather disconcertedly away from each other, Elfrida rose and left the room.

“Are you not a little hard on her, my dear?” asked the Colonel, gently.

“I don’t want to be hard upon her, I am sure, poor girl! but if she would only be a little interested in things, it would be better for herself.” And poor Mrs. Foxley, though she did not say it, felt it was a little hard



for herself. Did not she do everything? Were it not for her, would it not be shipwreck universal? She had so often cheered herself on, when Elfrida was a child, by thinking, "Ah! when I have a grown-up daughter!"

The Colonel returned no answer. He was very fond and very proud of Elfrida. She was his first-born and only surviving child, and universally acknowledged to be the prettiest girl in the neighbourhood.

"She never seems happy," continued Mrs. Foxley, "except when she is with these Summerwoods. I don't think their company does her any good."

"It seemed to do her a great deal of good at one time."

"Well, just then. But I hate all this nonsense of embroidering altar-cloths, and fald-stools, and all these heaps and heaps of needlework to do at home. And as to

its being more pious, stuff and nonsense!"

"Have a little patience with her, Rose, dear, and it will all come right. She is a tender-hearted child, and she has had a great shock. I am thankful to see her so much better."

"So am I. God knows how thankful I am! Do you know, Geoffrey, I sometimes wonder if there is anything between her and the Rector!"

"Summerwood? Why, he is almost old enough to be her father. I never thought of such a thing."

And then the Colonel thought, in his own mind, how women—even Mrs. Foxley—were always thinking on such subjects. But he liked "women to be women!"

"Still he is not old—not above forty—and she sees nobody else, and he is a good-looking man, though not the man *I* could fancy. But Elfrida is like me in nothing!"

“I don’t believe she ever thought of him in that way. Her veneration for him, I grant you, is absurd, but it is only as her spiritual guide. Not an uncommon thing in your sex, Rose, you must allow!”

“Well, among idle women, and for High Church people and Romanists, I suppose it is not uncommon,” said Mrs. Foxley, who was Low Church, when she had time to be anything.

The Colonel made no answer to this. He was not quite so confident of the limitations his wife had made as she was herself.

“I have sometimes fancied, at least,” she said, “that he admired her; but I hope she will never think of him.”

“Never, my dear. He is no match for her. His father was a dissenting minister, and they say his grandfather kept a huckster’s shop in Marshborough. Elfrida Foxley would never think of a man with such antecedents.”

But Mrs. Foxley, though she felt them to be a drawback, did not see the antecedents—or, indeed, mere antecedents of any kind—in quite the strong light her husband did. She made no immediate answer, but stitched on diligently. At last she asked,

“What kind of young man is this young Wynford?”

“Rose,” said her husband, impressively, “remember, there must be nothing of the kind you have been alluding to between our guest and our daughter.”

“Why not?” asked Mrs. Foxley, in amazement. “I am sure, Geoffrey, you ought to know me too well to suppose for a moment I should act the part of a manœuvring mamma; but if the thing came naturally——”

“Our Elfrida,” said the Colonel, “is in blood and beauty fit to be the match of a prince. But, for all that, Wynford may

have other views for his son. They are rich, and we are poor, and Elfrida shall marry no man who does not receive her alliance with a hearty welcome. I am proud for my daughter."

Mrs. Foxley was proud for her daughter too, but not quite so proud as her husband. She said emphatically,

"I am sure the best thing that could happen to Elfrida would be to fall in love—yes, even if she were to be disappointed. It would at least be something real to be melancholy about."

"I know what a good woman, and what a good mother you are, Rose, dear," said the Colonel; "but don't be hard upon poor Elfrida."

## CHAPTER VI.

THE LIGHT OF OTHER DAYS HAS FADED.

WE left Leigh Wynford just coming in sight of Willesmere Court. The long shadows of the aspens on the moat, the atmosphere of enchanted stillness which lay around the old-world place, were charming to the romantic young graduate.

“If I had known this place half a year ago,” he thought, “I should have tried for the prize-poem.”

At the door he found the Colonel, waiting to receive him—as royalty receives royalty. A tall, handsome man, who welcomed his guest with so stately a courtesy

that Wynford could hardly forbear a smile! "Just like an old story-book," he said to himself, as he returned his entertainer's salutation with all the ceremony possible to his nineteenth-century youth—his frank blue eyes shining with amusement as he thought how the fellows would have laughed if they could only have beheld the scene, so completely *à la Grandison* in its details. But it was time to dress for dinner, and with all due inquiries, stilted and verbose perhaps, yet truly sincere, after his father and mother, his own health and his own journey, the Colonel conducted him in person to his room.

It was a pleasant apartment, and though possessing few modern luxuries, their absence—at least, to our romantic second-class man—seemed more than compensated for by the real antiquity, unmarred by any anachronism which pervaded the whole en-

tourage. But he knew he had no time just then to lose either in exploring or in sentimentalizing, as the Colonel had told him it was nearly dinner-time, and hinted that punctuality was a *sine qua non* in the house ; so he set himself seriously to the pleasing labour of the toilet. It was a handsome and happy face, as well as a faultless shirt-front, and a coat of the newest cut, reflected by the ancient oval mirror which stood on the old oak slab in the window, through which peeped the clematis and the honeysuckle. At last he was ready, and found his way to the drawing-room.

It seemed unoccupied, and he was admiring the effect of the low sun as it touched the carving of the paneled walls with a ruby glow, when a slight rustle behind the quaintly-embroidered window-curtains at the far end of the room showed him he was not alone. The next moment a young lady came



forward with a bow, a faint smile, and a  
“Mr. Wynford, I believe?”

Wynford's breath was nearly taken from him, and, though a young, latter-half-of-the-nineteenth-century Oxford man, he almost stammered in answer, and certainly blushed. It was no common angel in blue ribbons with whom he found himself thus suddenly confronted, but the vision of Christchurch Meadows and the Sheldonian Theatre—St. Frideswide herself, in actual flesh and blood, who stood before him—even held out her hand and said (by no means a very remarkable speech),

“My father and mother will be down immediately.”

While Wynford was recovering himself, the young lady continued in a sweet-toned voice (the voice of a St. Cecilia, her unreasonably excited listener inwardly compared it to!)—

“I hope you are not tired with your journey?”

“Not at all, thank you. It was charming!”

Miss Foxley made no immediate rejoinder; but Wynford was himself again, and continued the conversation with almost his natural ease of manner.

“I trust, Miss Foxley, you enjoyed the Commemoration?”

He could see that she looked surprised; but she answered quietly, in a sort of matter-of-fact way, one would have said (Wynford called it dignified), had it not been for the musical quality of her voice:

“I enjoyed being at Oxford very much—it is such an interesting place; but I am not sure about the Commemoration. I fancy I should have enjoyed it more at a quieter time. But how did you know I was there?—did papa tell you?”

“No. I met you one night in Christchurch Meadows, and saw you again at the theatre. I did not guess who you were, or imagine for a moment I should so soon have the pleasure of knowing you.”

Had Wynford been a conceited young man, as conceited as his advantages entitled him to be, instead of a very simple-minded and unpractised youth, he might have been a little piqued at the composure, and even indifference, with which she answered,

“What an odd coincidence! I wonder you remembered me again. I don’t think I noticed you at all; but then there were so many young men.”

“Were you at the Procession of Boats? I happened to be the stroke of the head boat this year,” said Wynford, modestly, and yet no doubt with some pardonable vanity.

“Were you?” said Miss Foxley, with the tone of one who was certainly in a state not

only of lamentable ignorance, but of absolute indifference with regard to the distinction implied. "I was not there. I went with our Rector and his sister to Oxford. I had so long wished to go. We expect them here to dinner ; I wonder they have not come."

As she spoke, her eyes glanced down the long room, beginning to grow dusk now at the further end ; and the unreasonable Wynford became the subject of a new and odd and not wholly amiable sensation. Who was this Rector, and why did she look as if his visit interested her so much ?

His eyes followed hers to the door, which opened and admitted, not the Rector, but Colonel and Mrs. Foxley. Mrs. Foxley had scarcely bidden Wynford welcome, when Mr. and Miss Summerwood were announced. Wynford looked at the Rector with a sharp pang of curiosity, but could

only see in the increasing twilight that he was a man of tall stature and imposing presence—a result of his observations by no means so satisfactory as it ought to have been. It was consolatory, however, to discover, by the light of the wax candles on the dinner-table, that he was certainly forty years of age, at least. That he was still a handsome man, Wynford tried to deny to himself, with an inward misgiving that Elfrida Foxley might think otherwise.

Most persons, indeed, would have thought otherwise ; though, doubtless, Wynford would not have found himself alone in disliking his face. It was a supercilious face—a narrow-minded, but not a weak face. There was force of will in his firmly-set, well-cut lips, controlling, as it were, a certain coarse sensuality of expression which marred their physical beauty. His eye was keen, perhaps passionate, but there was

nothing in the whole countenance to indicate breadth of intellect or tenderness of heart ; it was the face of an ideal "priest," as the character is conceived by those who most dislike it.

Wynford hated him—hated his tone of superiority and his condescending manner, and chafed at the deference with which Miss Foxley treated him. Miss Summerwood, a tall, old-maidish, ill-dressed person, appeared to regard her brother as something between a Pope and an angel ; and whenever he opened his lips, stopped speaking herself, as if to gather up his words.

It was very intolerable. But Wynford found some mitigation of the evil in the fact that he was seated next Miss Foxley, in whose conversation, except when obtruded on his notice, he could almost forget the obnoxious Rector. Not, perhaps, that the conversation was witty or wise or learned.

There might even have been found people in the world who would have thought it silly. But there are times when one wants a pillow for the mind. To live for ever in a mental gymnasium would scarcely suit the very doughtiest of mental athletes.

The dinner was not *à la Russe*, but English, with the intensest Anglicanism of the olden time. The scarlet strawberries and the ripe red cherries, and the ruby wine, were reflected again by the dark table, bright as a mirror with the polish of centuries.

Wynford had never seen dessert in this fashion before, but he admired it, as in keeping with the old place, thereby making Mrs. Foxley happy. She thought him genuinely the most charming, natural young man she had ever seen. The Colonel, too, was pleased, and his satisfaction made him eloquent.

“I hate,” he said, “all new-fangled non-

sense. Why cannot we be content with old England as it was in the merry days of our forefathers, when it was not every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost? I should like to know if railways, and halfpenny posts, and electric telegraphs, and the extension of the franchise, has made anybody honester or happier or more content. And as to this eternal worry of posts and letters, and the lying puffs it brings in its train, what were the plagues of Egypt in comparison? Swarms of lies are surely worse than swarms of locusts."

"My dear!" said Mrs. Foxley; and in a calmer tone he began again.

"I have forbidden the postman to call here more than once a day."

Nobody made any answer. Mr. Summerwood's look of forbearance was, however, sufficiently expressive, and Wynford could not quite see the necessary connection be-



tween the virtues and inconveniences of the past. He did not, however, trouble much about such matters. He asked Elfrida, with laughing eyes but a grave voice, if she was quite reconciled to these arrangements.

“I don’t think much about them,” she said ; “sometimes it seems inconvenient.”

Certainly this was very amiable, though it might have sounded very matter-of-fact from any one else. But Elfrida looked so like a mediæval saint,

“Scarce of earth, nor all divine,”

that one would almost as soon have thought of crediting St. Agnes herself with a perception of the ludicrous. Wynford followed the ladies quickly to the drawing-room, but as his hand was on the lock of the door, he was annoyed to find Mr. Summerwood immediately behind him.

Miss Foxley and Miss Summerwood were seated close together by a light at a table,

apparently both engaged on the same work—a large and very magnificent piece of embroidery on velvet. Wynford was summoning all his astuteness to his aid in concocting a plan, which should be at once polite and effective, to supplant the elder lady, when Mr. Summerwood, in the coolest manner, asked his sister to make room for him, and thus secured the coveted position. All the time he was examining the ladies' work, with what appeared to Wynford an unmanly connoisseurship, the unreasonable youth was mentally chafing with ill-suppressed indignation, and answering the Colonel's kind commonplaces in a random manner.

His impatience was rising to the boiling point, when Miss Foxley addressed him.

"You will see our church to-morrow, Mr. Wynford. It is thought a very fine one, and has just been restored, thanks to Mr. Summerwood. This is the altar-cloth, which

Miss Summerwood and I are working."

"It seems a very handsome one. My mother was doing one the last time I was at home, but it was not nearly so handsome as this."

"A pious work!" said Mr. Summerwood, with authoritative approbation of Mrs. Wynford, which somehow or other enraged her son.

"A very good amusement for ladies," he said, in not quite the pleasantest of tones. "But there are, I should suppose, better ways of doing God service."

Mrs. Foxley looked up approvingly as Wynford spoke. The Rector answered, in a tone intended to be of mild rebuke, rather at variance with a certain sinister sparkle, of his eye,

"Of course there are; but our spiritual Mother, while insisting on the greater, encourages the minor works of charity."

Wynford returned no answer, but he and the Rector were henceforth aware that they stood in a hostile attitude to one another. The Rector had meant to condescend to and to patronize the young Oxford man, who had returned evil for good—at least, so Mr. Summerwood thought, as he assured himself that he forgave and pitied the insolent boy !

It was quite a relief to Leigh when the Summerwoods took their departure ; but he was destined to another trial, when Mr. Summerwood returned to the room to say what appeared to be a few confidential words to Miss Foxley.

“ Coxy, designing fellow ! ” Wynford was saying in his heart, when his complacency was in some measure restored by Elfrida inviting him to come out on the terrace to look at the moonlight.

“ You were saying your college gardens looked so pretty by moonlight.”

He followed her down the steps which led from the window upon the terrace, with a sensation as if he were walking into heaven. If it was not heaven, it was at least a very lovely earth which met his eyes. Like a silver flood the moonlight lay about the meadows, like an atmosphere of diamonds it quivered through the aspens. It was so cool after the hot day! The chimneys and the gables rose so clear and dark, the wall-flower was so fragrant, and the song of the nightingale so passionate and sweet! He confessed at once to her repeated challenge that it was far prettier than the college gardens. But probably he was not thinking much either about them or about the old moated house. He had only a general sense of beauty and sweetness as the fit accompaniment of a presence that was all sweetness and beauty. But such ecstatic moments are never more than moments, and he seemed

to fall down all of a sudden on the dreariest flats of the common-place, when she said,

“You should see the church by moonlight!”

Instead of making any suitable rejoinder, he asked, with apparent abruptness of idea,

“Is Mr. Summerwood a married man?”

“Oh! dear, no!” said Elfrida. “Mr. Summerwood is too holy a man to marry!”

“Nonsense, my dear,” said Mrs. Foxley, who at this moment joined them. But Wynford’s heart leapt up at Elfrida’s words. Suppose they were nonsense, what did it signify?

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE HOUR OF TRIUMPH.

GODFREY was still in Oxford. He had lately been elected fellow of his college, and now, a week or two after his triumph, he was sitting alone in his rooms. But Godfrey did not look triumphant.

As he lay back in the old leather arm-chair which had once done service in the library of the Deanery, the terribly bright rays of the afternoon sun, falling aslant his face, he looked fagged and anxious, almost old and careworn. One or two letters lay open on the large portable writing-desk before him; there was a great litter of books

and papers on the table, and a general dusty aspect over everything—owing, perhaps, to the merciless brightness of the light, which, unmitigated by blind or curtain, streamed into every corner.

Godfrey rose and walked to the window. It looked, as I have said, on the quadrangle, now cut diagonally by the sunshine and shadow, into two triangles, Turneresque in their mass and contrast. But Godfrey hardly noticed it; he only felt that it was very hot, and threw open the window, which made it, if possible, hotter, for the air welled in as if from a furnace; then he drew down the blind and returned to his seat, great beads of moisture standing on his pale face. Yet it could hardly have been the heat alone that made Godfrey look so weary and unnerved; he had studied passionately through even hotter weather than this, and hardly perceived it.



He took up one of the letters, and read it over once more. It was from Leigh Wyndford, dated a couple of days after his arrival at Willesmere Court, and was written in the somewhat hyperbolical style natural to that enthusiastic youth. He wrote eloquently, if a little wordily, of the originality and romance of the place; and he had discovered St. Frideswide, and St. Frideswide was—— But he would not describe her—Godfrey did not deserve it. Perhaps they might meet some day, and then! There was a brief postscript to this letter, which ran as follows:—

“Laugh if you like—I don’t care!”

But Godfrey was not laughing; on the contrary, he was reading the letter with an intensity of interest so very boyish an epistle scarcely seemed to merit. He had read it several times before, and he now laid it down with a sigh.

"I wish I were Wynford!" he said, almost in articulate words. Then he opened a book which lay among the litter and dust of the table (it was "Faust"), and read,

"Ein Kerl der speculirt  
Ist wie ein Thier auf dürrer Heide  
Von einem bösen Geist im Kreis herumgeführt,  
Und rings umher liegt schöne, grüne Weide."

"Why cannot I take it all for granted, like the rest, and graze in the fat green meadows of Protestantism? Why cannot I have a pleasant rectory, where some wife sweet as St. Frideswide, may walk with me on the shady lawn, in the cool of the Summer day; or sit opposite me in the cozy library, by the firelight of a Winter evening, Why is it laid on me to break my mother's heart, and even Nelly——"

Then Godfrey took up another letter, which lay open on the desk, and read:

"MY DEAREST SON,

"I need not tell you how happy

the news of your election has made me. Our difficulties seem all over now; and, what is far better, under God's providence, we owe it to you. May our Heavenly Father grant that the two dear boys may follow the example of their elder brother! I am a happy woman, even in my widowhood, to have such a son. You know, Frederick, I never say more than I feel, and I could not *say* so much as I write. To-day I cannot write on ordinary subjects, and shall therefore conclude with Nelly's love and congratulations. That God may continue to bless and prosper you, is the constant prayer of your fond mother,

“CHARLOTTE GODFREY.”

A sort of despair came over Frederick Godfrey's face as he laid down this letter; and he groaned audibly.

Mrs. Godfrey was an Evangelical Low

Churchwoman of the strictest school, and in this faith she had brought up her family. The Dean had professed the same creed, but in a milder and larger form, as his had been a milder and larger intelligence. But it must not be supposed that Mrs. Godfrey was either a silly or a weak woman ; on the contrary, she was possessed of many accomplishments, and great force of character. In her narrow circle her influence was powerful. In truth, intensity of conviction is almost always power, whereas subtlety of intellect is apt to be weakness—at least, in action. In their childhood, her family would as soon have thought of questioning their own existence as their mother's wisdom. Her dogmas were enunciated, and received as infallible utterances—as infallible as if they had been guaranteed by the decree of an Œcumenical Council. It is long before doctrines so received can by any mind be

questioned. By most minds they never are.

But Frederick Godfrey's was not an intellect to rest for ever satisfied with the conclusions of another person. It was searching, logical, fond of system, impatient of doubt, and strongly conscientious. The Calvinism in which he had been educated he found to be as much contradicted as supported by the authority on which it was alone supposed to rest. Then he saw how, with equal, or superior claims, other systems could equally prove, or seem to prove, themselves to be right from the same authority. This was trying, but for the time exciting, and Godfrey searched on, believing he should come to the true solution ; for all this time it never once struck him that Religion, like Scripture, might perhaps not be a system at all ; or, if it is, that it might require a larger view than

ours to establish in every point its consistency. Ritualism had no attraction for the severe taste of Frederick Godfrey ; but Anglicanism, apart from its frippery, and because it offered certainty, had. But he soon saw that it occupied but the place of the fabled tortoise on which the world rests. If this was the kind of authority which he must accept, the Anglican Church was not the Church which really possessed it. It was Rome, or nothing.

Into this corner Godfrey was now, after a period of doubt, finally driven. On the one hand lay honour, which, little as he seemed to covet it, he dearly loved, fortune, friends, family affection—all that men, even good men, love ; on the other hand, only conscience.

As yet Godfrey had communicated his struggles only to one person. To Wynford he had never spoken on the subject. He

would only have listened in uncomprehending amazement. His own family would have believed it was a temptation of the devil—even Nelly; for though it had always been considered seemly that the women of the Godfrey family should be as much interested as the men in all that concerns the higher faculties of our nature, they were apt to be, if not more prejudiced, at least more excitable. The one person then of whom Godfrey could think as a counsellor, had been one of the professors, and his lectures had served as a finger-post to the goal at which the pupil had all but arrived. This man had lately declared his conversion to the “old faith.”

His present residence was only a few hours' journey from Oxford. To him Godfrey repaired, not once, but over and over again, with what result it is not difficult to guess. Most kind, most sympathising had

been that ex-professor, and Godfrey the reserved had opened his heart to him as he had never opened it before to any of woman born.

There was but one step to take. That was, at last, but not till after his election to the fellowship, somewhat sadly agreed upon. On the day it was finally decided, Frederick Godfrey, like one in an unreal world, walked out of the professor's house into the blue, warm air. The whole earth was wrapped in the glory of Summer. Roses blossomed, birds sang, and, far out of sight, over the green cornfields, the lark shouted his excelsior. But there was no excelsior in Godfrey's heart. The jubilant spirit of the martyr had not been granted to him. The external beauty oppressed him, like something strange.

He felt as if he should like to be lying in his own dull little room in the College



Green, at Marshborough, the light darkened, and his mother and Nelly reading him to rest for ever with those old Puritan hymns which had been so tiresome to learn on the Sundays of his childhood, but the recollection of which now was sweet as the songs of Fatherland to a home-sick stranger. Oh ! if life might only thus ebb away while all that made it dear was yet his own ! But this was only the shrinking of the flesh and the quivering of the nerves ; like that of the patient who has made up his mind to the surgeon's knife, when he hears the surgeon's step at the door.

Godfrey's determination was not shaken—no, not even while he was reading his letters, and knew that such letters he should never receive again.

With that despairing face, he remained for some minutes leaning back in the old leather chair. Suddenly he rose, swept

away all the papers, and, without looking at them again, placed them tidily in his desk, shutting and locking it; then he took his hat, and walked out. He had turned his back on the past!

## CHAPTER VIII.

## A MIDSUMMER-DAY'S DREAM.

THE time which Godfrey had passed in struggle and pain had been to Leigh Wynford like a cake all compacted of sweets, so cunningly mixed that it neither palled nor cloyed. Even the weather, though hot in cities and on dusty roads, was perfect at Willesmere Court. It was delicious to lounge away the hot noon under the lime-tree, reading Tennyson, or listening to the hum of the bees and the drip of the water; and it was rapture of a nature more acute to wander far over the meadows in the rosy hush of the sunset, or to stroll

in the Pleasaunce by the old rookery, as the blue of the sky deepened into violet, and the stars grew larger and brighter, and a voice sweeter even than the nightingale's thrilled with passionate music the reason-bereft heart of the young graduate. In those days of unreality, the scent of the night-blowing primrose seemed sweeter than any known perfume, and the blossoms of the white periwinkle, shining out from the dusk of the leaves, looked like the stars of a lower firmament!

There is to be no Time in heaven, we are told; and there are seasons—rare ones, certainly—of absorbing sensation even in this world of fragmentary interests and subdivided sequences, which seem to raise us up to this Unity of Being.

Wynford could hardly have told whether those days at Willesmere Court were an eternity or but a moment. He was conscious

only of a fulness of life which reckoned neither hours nor minutes. At the end of the two or three days which he had been originally expected to stay, he did not throw out even a hint of bringing his visit to a conclusion. The Colonel became uneasy. What would his old friend Wynford say?

“It muse be done, Rose, my dear.”

“What must be done?” she said, with just the least shade of irritation.

She was sitting in her little morning-room, where she often did her household needle-work. It was very hot now, for the room got all the morning sun. She was stitching laboriously a fine linen collar, and thinking how, if she could only have had a sewing-machine like Miss Summerwood's, it would have been done in the twinkling of an eye, and she, too, might have been sitting under the lime-tree, and listening to the drip of the

water and the hum of the bees. But she knew that her husband would be only a few shades less astonished at a proposal to purchase a sewing-machine than by a suggestion that a guillotine might be a desirable article of household furniture.

“I must write to Wynford.”

“About what?”

“Don’t you see, my dear?—don’t you see?”

“But won’t it seem rather ridiculous in us to think that, because a young man talks and makes himself agreeable to our girl, he must be falling in love with her?”

“I don’t care what it *seems*, Rose; and a young man ought not to talk and make himself agreeable in that way to a girl, unless he *is* falling in love with her. It used not to be the way for a gentleman in my time, at least.”

In her heart Mrs. Foxley approved of

this sentiment, though she did feel such sharp-sightedness rather uncalled-for.

"I am only glad," she said, "to see Elfrida a little like other girls. She has not been to the Rectory since Wynford came."

"Nonsense about the Rectory!" said the Colonel; "but this is different."

"You won't write for a few days, Geoffrey dear? Really it seems so absurdly vain to fancy in so short a time——"

"I am going to write to-day."

When the Colonel spoke in that tone, he meant it, and Mrs. Foxley knew further opposition was useless.

She sat stitching the fine linen collar with hot hands and stiff needle, and worried brain, in silence. But by degrees she became much interested in getting to the end of the collar by luncheon-time. Then she reflected that "the matter was taken out of her hands," as she ex-

pressed it ; and as she owed no small part of the contentment and cheerfulness of her life to this dash of fatalism, it must be counted in her for wisdom and faith. That very day the threatened letter was written and dispatched.

After friendly greetings as elaborate—and, according to modern notions, stilted—as they were sincere, the old officer continued : “ I need not say we are glad to have your son here, and he seems happy with us. He is, in truth, a youth of whom any father might be proud. I, you know, have no son, but am the last of my race, and it is my earnest prayer that I may be permitted to preserve intact the honour we have maintained, while our lands and our wealth have passed away ! But though I have no son, I feel, in case it may have slipped your memory, that I ought to remind you I have a daughter, who, many people seem to



think, has inherited the beauty as well as the name of her ancestress, Elfrida, who presided at the tourney held in the plain of Marshborough, in the reign of Edward the First. But however that may be, the girl is certainly comely, and we fancy your son seems to think so. No mischief can be done yet, and most likely I am over-hasty in thinking that any is likely to happen. But I will have no broken hearts, and my daughter, as you know, is portionless. If, therefore, you think the youth in danger, you had best recall him, and so oblige

“Your faithful old friend,

“GEOFFREY FOXLEY.”

“It is very disagreeable,” said Mrs. Foxley. “Suppose he should recall him! It would be rather mortifying!”

“To feel that one has acted the part of an honourable gentleman can never be mortifying,” her husband said.

Nevertheless he felt his poverty more bitter at that moment than he had ever felt it before. His Elfrida, who in blood and beauty, as he had himself said, was a fit match for a prince !

It was with a beating heart that Mrs. Foxley watched her husband take the letters from the bag on the important morning that was to bring the answer. They were all at the breakfast table, and he dealt them round composedly. Mrs. Foxley was so nervous that Wynford must have noticed it, had he not been putting eggs, and honey, and all sorts of things on Elfrida's plate, with a pre-occupied devotion, and an utter regardlessness of appearances, which prevented his having ears or eyes for anything else.

"Two for you, Wynford," said the Colonel ; but Wynford did not hear.

"Two letters, Mr. Wynford," said Elfrida, with a smile and a blush which

were very becoming, as she laid them by him. Then he saw them.

“One from my mother! Ah! I thought she would write to-day. My tailor’s bill I think the other is. They will keep till after breakfast!”

“I have a letter from your father,” said the Colonel.

“They don’t expect me to-morrow, do they?” said Wynford, now tearing open his mother’s letter.

Mrs. Foxley’s heart leapt into her mouth, or at least she so described it afterwards.

“No, they say nothing about your return. They seem pleased you should remain, as long as you are happy.”

Mrs. Foxley drew a long breath. She could just hear Wynford whisper to her daughter,

“Then that would be for ever!”

Poor Mrs. Foxley! she felt quite young

again, and could have danced and sung in the joy of her heart.

After breakfast, she eagerly joined her husband, who gave her the elder Wynford's letter to read.

"Thank you, my dear old friend," he wrote, "for your letter. It has surprised us, for we had forgotten how time flies. But we feel that under your roof our son can be in no danger ; and to your care and that of Providence we commit him. We have barely time to answer letters here by return of post, so I must be brief. My wife is writing to Leigh. With our best regards to Mrs. and Miss Foxley, ever your old and sincere friend,

"HENRY FREDERICK WYNFORD."

So that the current of Leigh Wynford's love promised to run smooth. No obstacles, at least, were to be interposed by "flinty-hearted fathers," or other earth-worms of that prosaic class who believe that a man

must eat to live. It is true that Wynford, père and mère, had, in a vague way, other views for their son. Had not their Leigh a right to expect rank and wealth as well as beauty? There was a certain Lady Annie, at present only fourteen, but—

It was very natural in Leigh. It was a pity he had gone to Willesmere Court. But it was their fault. Neither the squire nor his wife was addicted to being lacyhrmose over spilt milk, and Leigh's wishes were—Leigh's wishes. Only it was very hard they were not, after all, as they had so fondly hoped, to have him all to themselves.

"I could not recall him," said Mr. Wynford. "Foxley is the very soul of honour. I could not deal him such a blow."

And the mother wrote to her son, but without, by her husband's advice, in any way particularly mentioning Miss Foxley.

Leigh Wynford was allowed to make love

to his heart's content. Almost from the first he had rushed into it quite consciously.

“Eager to run the race his fathers ran.”

Any doubt he might have as to his ultimate success was only just enough to lend a zest to the pursuit. Certain little vacillations in Elfrida's feelings gave to her manner all that stimulating coyness which is rare in perfectly frank natures, but was genuine in her.

It was very pleasant indeed to have a lover—she had never quite realized how pleasant it was to be admired for everything she said and did and looked, to be worshipped like a goddess, to have every word she dropped from her lips gathered up as if it were the pearls and diamonds of the persecuted younger sister in the fairy-tale. And then to be so rich!—to have carriages and horses and money at her command, to be a great lady like the ancestresses she had so often

heard of! And Leigh himself—he was good. looking, and as he had taken honours, must be clever, though she should certainly not otherwise have found out that he was clever. For instance, though she had never heard that Mr. Summerwood had taken honours, she knew he was clever. But she should be afraid of a husband so superior as Mr. Summerwood; and Elfrida blushed to herself at having ever for a moment connected the thought of such a man with anything so mundane as matrimony.

The visions she had indulged in for the last twelve months, of a life among the pious Anglican sisters at Nunfield, secure of heaven, and full of peace on earth, vanished away in favour of a more highly-coloured and sensational existence. Married people were not debarred from heaven, surely. She would have liked to ask Mr. Summerwood, but her feminine soul shrank from

this profanation of its mysteries. She wished Wynford were not quite so ardent. Why did he hurry on so fast? She should like time to think if she could reconcile luxury on earth with happiness in heaven.

Wynford had now been a fortnight at Willesmere Court. He had been in the habit, as on that first day, of coming down a little early for dinner, having discovered that Elfrida generally worked at the altar-cloth in the drawing-room for half an hour at that time. But, on the day in question, she was not at her accustomed labours. Somewhat disconcerted, he strolled out on the terrace—she was not there. What could this mean? Had he affronted her? Disappointed, and, withal, a little cross, he went to the Pleasaunce in search of her. But he could not find her in the Pleasaunce.

He was in that mental condition to which



lovers, and other semi-insane persons, are prone, and which consists in attributing profound meanings to accidental trifles. "What if she should really intend it for a slight?" The idea was frightful! How could he live without Elfrida? How could he go in to dinner? How could he even pretend to eat till his mind was at rest? Where was she? Where had she hidden herself?

But she had not hidden herself at all—she had only been a little longer dressing than usual—too simple a solution of the mystery for a lover to have thought of—and had run down to the moat for a spray of wild roses for her hair.

All at once he met her at the corner of the rookery. She stopped when she saw him. A certain nervous smile brightened her dreamy eyes, and brought a flush, delicate as that of the wild roses, on her cheeks. The sun played through the

branches on her hair, and the shadows of the leaves seemed to dance round her, as in some of Millais' best pictures. The blood rushed like a torrent, hot and fierce, through Leigh's veins. Repression was no longer possible.

"Elfrida!" he cried, "I cannot bear it! I show you my heart plainly. Show me yours, or I shall go mad!"

He took both her hands, and looked straight into her eyes, blue and dark, like hyacinths, in the shadow of the May woods.

"You hurt me," she said, trembling, and turning away.

"Hurt you!—I would rather kill myself!" He loosened his grasp, and coming yet closer to her, whispered an agitated entreaty.

She was by no means prepared to say "No," and in such a state of feeling it is not surprising that Wynford's impetuosity car-

ried all before it. Any little weak-minded "but" was borne away and overwhelmed at once, as a mountain flood bears away and overwhelms the stick with which a child has thought to stay its course. Before she had had time to think, she was carried off under the trees, and had discovered that, if Wynford could be rough, he could also be tender. As for dinner, it was utterly forgotten. The shadows had considerably lengthened, and the level sun was looking up into their faces, when the striking of the church-clock recalled Elfrida to recollection.

"We have been here a whole hour! They must be waiting dinner. Oh! what will papa say?"

"Let us go and beg forgiveness," said Leigh.

"Now—this moment?"

"Yes, this very moment. Why not?"

She yielded again to his impetuosity, with the same nervous look in her eyes and excited glow on her cheek.

“Don’t be frightened, darling. Let me support you. I will do everything.”

And his heart swelled with the pride of conscious manhood—the new, sweet responsibility that he had to guard and to think for a dearer and tenderer self.

The old Colonel and his wife had been waiting in the drawing-room for more than half an hour, greatly to the amazement of the servants, who had never known their master to wait so much as ten minutes on any previous occasion with even a pretence at patience.

“Young people will be young people,” he said to his wife. “They certainly ought not to keep us waiting dinner; but there is no rule without an exception.”

These two remarks could scarcely be said

to be original, but not the profoundest depth of wisdom, or the boldest flight of imagination, could have yielded a result more satisfactory to his auditor.

“Here they come at last!” she cried, and tried to look unconcerned.

“You must forgive us for once,” said Leigh, boldly yet with a blush. He stopped and looked from the one to the other. “We are engaged. You are not angry?”

“Angry!” cried Mrs. Foxley; and in their mutual happiness she and Leigh fairly flung themselves into one another’s arms, and kissed for joy.

The Colonel, as became him, tried hard to be dignified, and to make a speech befitting the arrangement of an alliance between the families of Wynford and Foxley; but his voice got husky and his eyes grew dim. He could only say, “God bless you both!”

\* \* \* \* \*

When Elfrida withdrew to her own room that night, she remained for a long time sitting in an attitude thoughtful if not dejected. At last she rose hastily, and taking a little leather case from the drawer, unlocked it, and placing a crucifix before her on her dressing-table, knelt down with a book in her hand. But Elfrida's thoughts would not go along with the words of the book. Perhaps if she had prayed about what occupied her thoughts, about Leigh Wynford and her new future, it might have been different. But these were merely worldly things. God would be displeased to be addressed on such subjects. The poor child fell into a state of terror at what she had done. Responsibility of any kind was a burden she could not bear; she ought to have let the Church (that is, Mr. Summerwood and the Lady Superior at Nunfield)

decide for her. Oh ! suppose she had parted with that title to indemnity from endless torture of which lately she had believed herself to be so secure !

Leigh Wynford, in the meantime, had no drawback to his joy. He lay awake thinking how charming Elfrida was, how delicious life would be with her. No man had ever been so kind to his wife as he would be to his. If possible, he would anticipate every wish, and guard her from every sorrow ; and she would love him and trust him as another and stronger self. In short, Eden should be renewed in the Bloomshire valley where Thorleigh Court lay. In his joy he felt as if he could have embraced the world.

## CHAPTER IX.

## ELFRIDA.

ELFRIDA FOXLEY had “a history,” —in spite of her personal attractions, not a love-history, however, as yet. Gifted with a wonderful, appealing beauty, Destiny, moderate for the most part in her favours, had withheld any uncommon share of other gifts. She had no speciality of any kind but her good looks; but are not these, in a woman, says Lord Macaulay, according to the old Greek song, “what the horns are to the buffalo, what the paw is to the tiger, what the sting is to the bee?”



But if she had no brilliant qualities, she had certain deficiencies which did as well. Soft ignorance is so like innocence, and dove-like helplessness not only rouses man's chivalry, but flatters his vanity. He fancies such a woman will be so easily led. Elfrida was easily led, at least by certain leaders—a model as a wife altogether in the eyes of the class of men whose idea of a wife's mind is that it should be a blank sheet of paper, on which a husband may print off a copy of his own. The pity is, however, that it is not always a copy of *his* mind that is so printed; it may just chance that it is a copy of somebody else's mind—the Roman Catholic priest's, perhaps, or perhaps that of the leading member of the Plymouth Brethren. A very wise principle of selection can perhaps hardly be expected from the blank-sheet class of mind. In fact, we are brought back

to the old truism, that everything has its disadvantages—even blank sheet female minds.

Up to eighteen years of age, Elfrida Foxley was a gentle, quiet, commonplace girl, who, as was natural, liked idleness better than work. Not absolute yawning idleness; but she preferred loitering in the garden, and about the fields, in the fine weather, playing a few bars on the piano, reading a few verses of sentimental poetry, and skipping a novel, the more namby-pamby the better, to any more energetic occupation. The admiration her uncommon beauty received was fast giving her a taste for company. It was wonderfully pleasant to be made of so much importance, and without any trouble, too. She had even thoughts of a brilliant marriage, for she was not inaccessible to the smaller and commoner kinds of ambition, when an accident happened

which changed the whole current of her feelings.

An old school-fellow, the daughter of a clergyman, was spending a week or two at Willesmere Court. This Emily was something of the same class of girl as her friend Elfrida, but more high-spirited, though not nearly so pretty. The talk of such girls was naturally of balls, dresses, and partners, harmless chatter enough, no doubt, if somewhat inane.

One afternoon, in the midst of an earnest discussion of this kind, they were overtaken by a thunderstorm (it was in the month of July) in the open country, a mile or two from home. It was in vain that they hastened on. The heavy black cloud which came up so fast against the wind, began all at once to discharge its contents, as if, indeed, the windows of heaven were opened. It was not rain. It was a drowning flood,

coming down from the clouds in solid water; at least so it seemed to the two terrified and ignorant girls. They ran to seek shelter under a tall elm-tree, the only protection to be seen on the wide common. There the violence of the storm increased. The flashes of lightning were unintermitting, and the peals of thunder like the incessant roar of a cannonade.

How long they remained there was never quite known, but later in the afternoon they were both found lying insensible at the foot of the tree, one branch of which had been scathed by the lightning. Emily was dead, but Elfrida was only stunned, whether by the shock of the lightning, or the mental horror, was never entirely ascertained. A long illness supervened, and this was succeeded by a depression of mind and body which seemed as if it would last her life. Her whole existence appeared to be para-

lyzed by terror. Her nerves were shattered to pieces. God appeared to her in the light of an unrelenting judge, and nature full of the instruments of his righteous vengeance. Emily, she never doubted, had been struck down because of her "worldliness," and it was in vain that her mother pointed out to her that it was expressly said that those on whom the Tower of Siloam fell were *not* greater sinners, &c., &c.

The wrath of God, the imminence of unknown and appalling vengeance, the prospect of undying flames, was before her for ever. She chanced, in a sort of lull of the pain in which she existed, to meet at a neighbour's house with a copy of Dante's "Inferno," illustrated by Gustave Doré. All the hideous forms of physical anguish there so powerfully realized by the weird and graphic genius of the artist, worked upon her mind with the intensity of a coming cer-

tainty. It was to her as if she beheld photographs of the scenery of the country for which her passage had been booked.

Elfrida passed a terrible night after that visit. Her parents were almost in despair. Change of air and scene was tried in vain. Many doctors were consulted, and they did not differ. They alleged that her condition resulted from a "complete disorganization of the nervous system!" But this agreement, exceptional as it was, could scarcely be said to be satisfactory, in the face of the failure of all their nostrums.

Being, as it were, at his wit's end, the Colonel proposed calling in the advice of Mr. Summerwood. The proposal was hailed by Elfrida as a heretic in the grasp of the Familiars of the Inquisition might have hailed a rescue when about to be introduced to the rack.

"If you wished so much to see him, my

dear," said her mother, "why did you not say so?"

Elfrida made no answer, but the truth was she knew her parents disliked him, and she had dreaded their displeasure, with no one to back her. She had sometimes thought of seeking him by stealth. She had no moral courage; existence with her was one fear.

Colonel and Mrs. Foxley had different reasons for their dislike to, or, it might be more properly called, prejudice against, Mr. Summerwood. Mrs. Foxley disliked him because he was a High Churchman and a Ritualist. She was herself an "Evangelical" in her "views"—not of the severe and dreary type, but still decidedly an Evangelical. The Colonel was a Churchman. He despised and disliked equally Roman Catholics and Dissenters, and, next to them, he disliked Tractarians, and Evangelicals, and

Ritualists, and Broad Churchmen, and “all that modern stuff.” Give him the “good old Church of his forefathers.” He had had a feeling against the new Rector from the first, from the fact of his father having been a dissenting minister; and when he found that the son wore a coloured stole, burnt incense, and lighted candles by daylight, he said to his wife,

“Only the principle of re-action, Rose, my dear. Just as republics always end in military despotisms.”

But his chief offence had been what he (the Rector) called “restoring the Church.”

“Restoring!” said the Colonel. “Would it be restoring the old yew-tree to cut it down and plant in its place a weeping-ash, such as one sees on the lawn of a Cockney villa?”

The Colonel approved of the tall oak pews, and the gorgeous beadle, and the



great black and white "Commandments." Mr. Summerwood could not persuade him that these were comparative innovations, and having always been used to them, he could not see for himself that they were hideous and inconvenient. Then a coolness ensued. Neither gentleman was fond of contradiction.

But the Foxleys virtually acknowledged to each other, in their present strait, that relief from any quarter would be welcome, so the Rector was sent for.

He arrived instantly, his whole mien bespeaking universal forgiveness in a way which was, and was intended to be, truly magnanimous, but was really as abundantly expressive of the recollection of offence as the loudest upbraiding. He had a long interview with Elfrida, and from that day she was better. In a week she was working Church needlework, teaching a class of little children to sing in the Sunday-school,

and talking with interest of the devices for the decoration of the Church at Christmas. In the Spring there was a slight re-action ; and, by Mr. Summerwood's advice, she was sent for a little change for a few weeks to the care of "a very dear friend of his," the Lady Superior of a sisterhood at Smokeham, in Blackshire. The name of a sisterhood was, to the ear of Mrs. Foxley, terribly suggestive of Romanism, and Ritualism, and every sort of objectionable Ism ; but, as Elfrida seemed ready to fall as ill as ever at the prospect of not being permitted to go, she smothered her scruples, and, according to the dissenting preacher in the village, "sent her lamb among the wolves."

But there was no denying that she came back much improved. Daily prayers she would go to ; altar-cloths she would work ; she would bow incessantly during the service, and call things by names her mother

thought superstitious, and her father "new." But she was far more cheerful.

"These follies would die away," the Colonel said; "it was only girlish nonsense."

Elfrida had been his pet from her birth; what would have been a sin in another was a very venial error in her. He had been almost heart-broken to see her so ill, and his anxiety had never been relieved, as his wife's had occasionally, by a wholesome fit of indignation. Like Mrs. Chick of *Dombey* celebrity, Mrs. Foxley sometimes thought her daughter might have "made an effort."

But the "follies," if they were follies, did not even abate—at least not till Wynford came. But now she had actually missed going to morning prayers for two consecutive days! Another person had noticed the omission as well as her parents, but with very different sensations.

Mr. Summerwood felt it was time to be going after his stray lamb.

If it is not over-pleasant to any of us to have our influence superseded by that of another, it was even more odious to Mr. Summerwood than to most men. He had believed his power over Elfrida to be unbounded, and revolt in any sense, either as a fact or a precedent, was not to be tolerated. Holy, too, as poor Elfrida thought him, he was human enough to feel in every nerve the power of her beauty, and even to recognise the possibility of a moment of madness, when it might seem that "All for love, and the world well lost," was not so wholly beyond the range of his impulses as he had hitherto believed it.

That gracious shape, those soft and heavenly features, those beseeching eyes—their living sapphire intensifying and trembling with the trembling intensity of her feelings—had some-

times overpowered, if not his soul, at least his senses. But Mr. Summerwood could not marry a penniless girl. He wanted to build churches, to found services, to multiply curates, to establish guilds and sisterhoods, to be a great man in his own sect, and by and by in the world at large. In short, it was clear, at least to himself, that the path of piety and self-denial lay in the direction of matrimony, only if combined with money.

Of course he might marry Elfrida Foxley if he pleased. Did she not respond, like the sensitive plant, to his lightest touch? He was a handsome man, too, and there were women who would have given half their lives for him. That he knew; but he did not know the nature of Elfrida Foxley. It was far too pure and simple to be comprehended by Mr. Summerwood. He was essentially coarse in his ideas, both of love and pleasure, and it is precisely such tem-

peraments that are apt to confound virtue with asceticism.

Partly to save himself from temptation, he had arranged that first visit of Elfrida to Nunfield. By the time she had returned, he had in a great measure conquered the passion which stood, he believed, in the way of higher aims.

But it is one thing to renounce, and an altogether different thing to submit to be renounced. Mr. Summerwood and Leigh Wynford had from the first conceived a mutual dislike—the dislike of natures essentially antagonistic. Leigh's defiant manner, not unjustly, perhaps, was an offence to Mr. Summerwood; while Mr. Summerwood's airs of superiority were like spirit to fire upon the indignation of the younger man. It may be imagined, therefore, with what feelings of dismay the Rector heard from his sister that popular report credited the

obnoxious youth with being the accepted lover of Elfrida Foxley—Elfrida, whom he had believed to be his own wholly. His first impulse was to disbelieve it; but she had not been to church for two days! In a moment Mr. Summerwood was aware that he had not finally rejected her for himself. He remembered, with a sensation that was stinging, what a splendid match Wynford would be. He felt certain Elfrida's parents would favour him warmly. Probably they had invited him to Willesmere Court on purpose. What a fool he had been not to have seen it all from the first! But it might not be too late yet—it should not be too late!

This man had a dauntless confidence in the power of his own will—a matchless capacity for persuading himself of the rectitude of his own wishes; so, without a moment's delay, he took his hat and toiled up

to Willesmere Court, in the blazing sunshine of a Summer morning, shortly before noon.

He was received by Mrs. Foxley more cordially than he had ever been before. Her happiness filled her with universal good-will. She acknowledged now candidly the services of Mr. Summerwood, and was pleased to show that she did. He was conscious at once of the increased friendliness of her manner, and of a something altogether triumphant about her, and about everything.

Oddly enough, he felt his warmer reception depressing. That, coupled with the heat, perhaps, disconcerted him. But he inquired for Miss Foxley with all due dignity. He "was afraid she might have been indisposed, as he had missed her from the church for two days."

"Elfrida was quite well," her mother



said. "She had been much engaged, and—" There she stopped, and there seemed little more to be said.

He was not to see Elfrida, then! He was fast falling into that uncomfortable and slightly ridiculous condition apt to be described as a bad humour. But though few men were more capable of being in a rage, few men were more capable of controlling its outward demonstration. He walked to the window, conscious that it was a mental phase too undignified for him even to be suspected of.

It was the same window, shaded by the ancient curtains worked in unknown birds, in which, on the morning of Wynford's arrival, Elfrida had sat embroidering the altar-cloth. But Mr. Summerwood did not care for the scent of the honeysuckle, or for the fairy music of the aspens. His quick ear detected the sound of voices—of one voice which

at this moment made his heart throb, not altogether with one passion. Although almost hidden to ordinary eyes, he discovered sharply enough, at the far corner of the moat, under a clump of aspens, the broken outline of a female figure. At her feet lay another figure, which he also recognised or divined. He could see, or fancy, that he was looking earnestly up in her face.

The attitude and the whole scene were abundantly significant. A sudden spasm, a sudden almost superhuman effort, and the Rector, turning round, bade Mrs. Foxley "good morning."

"He would not detain her," he said, "as the Colonel was not at home; and he was glad to hear Miss Foxley was well."

She saw he had seen them, and smiled. He felt as if he should have liked to kill her! It seemed as if she triumphed in his torture. Yes, it was torture, and

torture all the more torturing that but for himself (so he thought) it might have been rapture instead. .

## CHAPTER X.

## THE COTTAGE IN THE CLOSE.

THE news of Frederick Godfrey's "per-  
version," as the Marshborough world  
called it, had come upon the Godfrey family  
like an earthquake. It was as if the founda-  
tions of their lives had suddenly been  
moved. His fears had not at all exagger-  
ated the light in which they were likely to  
regard it.

"Antichrist," the "Synagogue of Satan,"  
and such like, were the mildest names ever  
bestowed by Mrs. Godfrey on the Church  
of Rome ; and even these terms were feeble,  
as a transcript of the horror with which she

regarded the faith to which her son had become a convert. It was almost inconceivable that a child of hers should have been permitted thus to fall! And of this child she had been so proud and felt so secure! Often had she seen him in her mind's eye a pillar of the faith, acknowledged and honoured of all men. And now! Now he would be pointed at by Mrs. Godfrey's world with the finger of scorn. Mrs. Godfrey was one with whom it was an article of faith to believe that friendship with the world was enmity with God; but then her world was not "the world." Rather was it the "elect," "God's people." To such it had never struck her it was otherwise than highly praiseworthy to "be conformed to," or highly wicked to differ from.

Poor mother!—she thought she grieved solely over the loss of her son's soul, and

because he had become an "enemy of the Gospel;" but let us not be too hard upon her if, unknown to herself, a bitter worldly disappointment mingled with her grief. It is not so easily any of us behold the basket of crystal upon which, like the hero of the Eastern fable, we have built our hopes of prosperity, shattered to fragments. Then why had it happened to her? Had she not done all that became a mother? Had she not trained him up in the way he should go, toiled for him, prayed for him, and this sorrow had come on her, as on any careless parent? It was almost as if God had not kept faith with her.

Her daughter Helen, who slept in a little room adjoining hers, heard her toss and moan through the long, light hours of the Summer night, and occasionally even rise and wander about her room. Sometimes she fancied she could

hear a faint, smothered cry, and once she distinguished the articulate words, "What have I done?—oh! how have I sinned?" And her heart went out in fervent pity towards the strong-minded mother to whom she durst yet not offer her sympathy. How could Frederick be so cruel, as well as so wicked?

When she had time to think of anything but her mother, it was this thought that chiefly grieved Helen Godfrey.

She and her brother Frederick had been close friends all their lives. If Frederick had ever had a confidante, it was his sister Helen. He was older than she was, and up to this time it had been part of her creed that Fred was always cleverest, bravest, and best. In the days of her childhood her little heart would swell and tremble as she heard how a big dunce had given him a savage kick because he had

got above him in class, and afterwards waylaid him on his return from school; and proud tears filled her eyes when, on her suggesting that "Mamma should complain to the master," he gave utterance to some school-boy magnanimity on the subject of "sneaks," which found a ready echo in a soul which at all times had a strong proclivity towards the heroic. On his going to college, Helen was conscious of no diminution in her brother's confidence. His daily avocations, his successes, his friendship with Leigh Wynford, were all communicated to her. It was, therefore, an additional blow to find that all this time his inmost feelings had been hidden from her. She had been brought up to believe that Roman Catholics and Jesuits always acted in a double-dealing manner. What if Frederick were a Jesuit—if he had been a Jesuit all this time! She shuddered at the idea of the vague, terrible evil whose



presence might for years have been overshadowing her.

In this frame of mind she wrote to him a letter, the bitterness of its reproachful grief only equalled by the warmth of its relenting tenderness. This letter did not shake Frederick's convictions, but it nearly broke his heart. He wrote to his mother again, pouring out to her, as he had never done when he was her idol, the strong love of his heart, the reverence, the gratitude he felt for her, and for those principles of rectitude with which she had inspired him, and which alone had enabled him to sacrifice everything that was dear to him for conscience sake. He begged her, "on his knees," he said, to forgive him the pain he had given her, and to pray that the anguish he suffered might be made endurable.

Poor Frederick! This letter had been written too soon. Mrs. Godfrey's heart was

too much engrossed with her own suffering to realise his. Then that unfortunate sentence about the principles with which she had inspired him ! It was like an intentional affront ; it seemed to open yet wider the still gaping wound of her pride. To her morbid feelings the whole letter was an insult, was mere Jesuitical words, at variance with the facts of his conduct. Hitherto she had not written to her son. Now she wrote a few words, brief and stern.

“ Her son,” she said, “ was her son no longer. He was a Romish Priest, and as such, she did not feel that professions or asseverations on his part were to be credited. Was it not part of his faith to do evil that good might come ? ”

A terrible response to that outpouring of tenderness so exceptional to his reticent nature ! God alone knew the torture of suspense he had endured while expecting

that letter—God alone knew the desolation it inflicted.

Frederick Godfrey inherited his mother's pride. He had made his final appeal, and believed himself cast off. Between him and her now rolled the raging flood of strongly-felt theological difference. On its shores they stood with souls crying aloud for, eyes strained to catch a glimpse of, each other. But the yearning voices were unheard in the roar of the torrent, and the eager eyes peered only into the blinding mist of its spray.

Helen, too, had heard from her brother; but her letter was in a strain very different from that which he had addressed to his mother. Its tone was not penitent, but forgiving—the tone of one who magnanimously pardons an injury, of which he is yet profoundly conscious. It wounded her to the quick. She could not have believed it of

Fred! What! had he no compunction for his mother's suffering—no remorse for his brother's injured prospects? His nature was indeed changed! She, too, felt that he was no longer her brother, but a Roman Catholic priest. Yes, it was all true that she had been taught to believe of that wicked church! It was wrong of her ever to have doubted it for a moment, even in favour of Fred, and her warm heart trembled with mingled indignation and grief. She had not seen her brother's letter to her mother, or her feelings might probably have been modified.

Mrs. Godfrey had shown it to no one. Her children knew she had received it, but they could only guess at its contents by her stony countenance, and the fact that, at her meals, her food was most frequently left untasted on her plate. Poor Helen was nearly beside herself with anxiety. Had it

not been for her motherly friend, Lady Page, who occupied a large house near them in the Cathedral Close, she should hardly have known how to bear it.

But, after a few days had passed, Mrs. Godfrey began to rouse herself. She had strung her soul to bear the inevitable. The right hand which had offended her, no matter with what amount of lifelong anguish, was plucked off and cast from her! Once more she came down to breakfast at the usual hour, and resumed her old employments with a sort of emphasis which seemed to say that even the pain she had suffered was to be remembered no more.

Mrs. Godfrey inhabited a small house—a cottage it might be called—in the Cathedral Close of Marshborough. Now everybody knows the Cathedral Close is the “West-end” of a Cathedral city. Gentility as well as gravity presides over the quaint,

blackened, old-fashioned houses, and pervades the very atmosphere of the smooth-shaven, rather sooty lawns.

On the untimely death of the late dean it was almost feared that his widow might not be able to afford a residence in the quarter alone supposed to be befitting to ecclesiastical aristocracy. But her friends had bestirred themselves, and Lady Page had at last discovered a cottage which, with a little outlay, might easily be converted into a pretty and genteel, if not very commodious residence. Lady Page, being the widow of a Lord Mayor of London, was naturally rich. She bought the cottage, happening, at the time, she said, to be in want of an investment, and had it fitted up with every convenience which could by any possibility be crammed into it. It was so very lucky for her, she said, to be able to find such a tenant as "dear Mrs. Godfrey!" The cot-

tage was a funny-looking little place, squeezed in between the Cathedral and the office of the Registrar of the Diocese, and separated from the Cathedral garden by an almost infinitesimally narrow strip of lawn, bounded by a railing surmounting a low parapet wall. It seemed to present a sort of corner to the front, rounded off into a shallow oriel window, as if the Cathedral and the Register Office had compressed it between them till it bulged out. A carefully-trained jessamine, dingy with smoke from the prebendal chimneys by which it was surrounded, made the tiny spot look yet more sombre and stifling.

Behind, it was more cheerful. The cottage widened and spread out somehow. A splendid westeria covered the whole wall, and in the early Summer, when the south wind blew, wafted, through the open windows, rich, sweet odours from the masses of deli-

cate blossom which literally smothered one another in flowery profusion. Now the flowers were gone, but the leaves still draped the old walls with a scarcely less luxuriant beauty. The little lawn, which was large enough for croquet, was bound by a narrow ribbon of bright flowers. In the morning, Helen loved to watch the massive shadow of the cathedral tower, which sloped over the eastern wall, like the index of a gigantic dial. Here it was, in the shady corner by the rustic table and seats, where they often drank tea in the hot days, that the Godfrey family assembled to discuss ways and means. It was well, perhaps, for Mrs. Godfrey that she was forced to think about the affairs of this world. The defection of Frederick had thrown them into considerable pecuniary embarrassment. But no allusion whatever did she make to the cause of their financial difficulties. She merely



stated them. She lamented them most, she said, on account of the boys. She had desired to send them to a public school, that they might have the educational advantages due to the sons of a dean of Marshborough. But God had willed it otherwise. If she were to do so, there would not be enough for herself and her daughter to keep alive upon. She begged her dear sons to believe, and she knew she spoke the sentiments of Helen, that the barest necessities would have contented them. She feared "her boys" (here her proud lip trembled a little), "must be content to go to the college school."

"And very jolly too, mother, it will be," cried George, a boy of twelve. "Then we shall stay at home, and Nell will help us with our lessons, and Wilkes will let me up to the bells every day. Hooray! I wish he'd let us ring a bob-major for staying at home."

But William, the elder boy, fourteen, looked grave. He was indeed struggling bravely to keep back tears which he imagined would be childish, tears caused by a disappointment which was not altogether childish. He had heard much of the doings of his brother Frederick, and burned to emulate them.

Helen now came forward. She had been sitting a little behind the tree. Helen Godfrey was twenty years old, but slight and girlish in her figure for her age. She was by many persons considered pretty, and perhaps she had never looked prettier than she did now. Her face was characterised by a certain brightness of purpose; her clear though not fair cheeks flushed, and her brown eye lighted with a sort of embarrassed eagerness. The draught under the tree had becomingly stirred the rich clusters of her abundant hair, which, but for a certain

warmth of tone, might almost have been called black.

If Helen Godfrey was not beautiful, there were moments when she was more winning than many who are.

“No, mother,” she said, “I hope it may not be necessary to keep the boys at home. I have a plan. Lady Page thinks it quite feasible. I should not have proposed it unless.”

She spoke with resolution, yet with a certain nervousness. Her mother looked at her attentively, and Helen proceeded to explain. She had had herself an expensive education. She was a linguist and a musician, and, according to the wont of the Godfreys, was both clever and industrious, and had made the most of her opportunities, though this, of course, she did not say. With her connections and interest, she could get a hundred a year as a governess; that

would be a great help to the house-keeping at the cottage. William could go to school immediately. He must put his shoulder to the wheel and get a scholarship, and then George too could go.

Helen saw William's face brighten in spite of himself as she proceeded. But he said :

“ You a governess, Nelly ! You working for us ! ”

“ Why not, Will, if I am able ? I have your leave, mother, have I not ? ” said Helen ; but she hardly looked as if she were asking leave.

Something seemed to rise in Mrs. Godfrey's throat, and she felt that, if she tried to speak, it might overflow at her eyes. This would, doubtless, have done her good ; but no one ever had seen Mrs. Godfrey weep, not even her children. But William spoke.

“ You are a brick, Nelly, if there ever

was one! I will work for *you*, one day—see if I don't! That's all."

There was a slight, passionate quaver in the boy's voice, and, as the evening sunbeams sloped by the ivied chimney of the Register Office right upon his face, Helen could see that his eyes glistened.

"Do not make a promise you may be tempted to break, William," his mother said, with an accent of sternness which they all understood and pardoned.

Nobody spoke to suggest anything further. The matter seemed settled, or, at least, postponed for future discussion. The Godfreys were not much in the habit of making speeches to one another. In this respect I cannot think they were singular. Not many English families are, unless in fiction, and more especially in religious fiction, where brothers and sisters not only make long

speeches, but occasionally preach extempore sermons to one another. But I never met with such a case in real life, and I cannot altogether say I regret it.

That same evening, just after Helen had gone to bed, a figure might have been seen gliding into her room in the silver twilight of the Summer night. "May God bless you, my best child!" said her mother. This was the nearest approach to a speech made by anybody, but if it had been as long as one of Edward Irving's "Graces before Meat"—one of which, we are told, lasted two hours while the supper was waiting—it could not have made a deeper impression.

Helen sat up and threw her arms round her mother, and they clasped one another in a close embrace. No promises, no praise could more thoroughly have expressed their mutual affection and mutual comprehension. Mendelssohn has called some of his most

speaking compositions, “Lieder ohne Worte;” but there are not only songs, there are also speeches without words.

## CHAPTER XI.

## THE LORD MAYOR'S WIDOW.

LADY PAGE, widow of Sir Ebenezer Page, Bart., Lord Mayor of London during the visit of His Majesty the King of — to the City of London, and formerly M.P. for Marshborough, inhabited the largest mansion in the Cathedral Close, hardly even excepting the Deanery. And now what is there so absurd in being a Lord Mayor? Why does this civic dignity appear, to the county mind, so amusing a position? After all, what can there be really laughable in being the first magistrate of the first city in the world?—if my readers



will kindly pardon me for putting it thus grandiloquently. Is it the gilt coach? Is it an occasional, or rather imaginary, dubiousness in the direction of H's? Or has it anything to do with civic feasts and whitebait-dinners? After all, it can hardly be on account of the last-named dainty, for "Her Majesty's Ministers" annually partake of this aldermanic or ambrosianic food. Now, Her Majesty's Ministers, though often incapable, time-serving, dishonest (according to the showing of the Opposition), are never absurd, and always genteel. It cannot, therefore, be whitebait. What then can it be?

But as I am by no means prepared to solve the mystery, I shall not trouble my readers with further suggestions. I merely throw out the above hints as possible clues to any who may be inclined to unravel philosophically a social riddle, not more

unimportant than many others upon which people have written pamphlets, and tilted valiantly at wordy jousts.

But the fact remains. Mrs. Headlam, of Knockhampton, and Mrs. Green Oldacres, of Oldacres Court, at first found Lady Page (whose husband, it had been whispered, was originally a grocer) exceedingly absurd, but either they had got used to her, or contact with their unexceptionable selves had improved her, for they now allowed that her "little vulgarities" were "much rubbed off." She was "really a useful, sensible, plain sort of woman, who, if not quite-quite—did nothing to offend." And Squire Headlam and Mr. Green Oldacres, the latter, chairman of the Quarter Sessions, said she gave the best dinners in their division of the county.

"But that, you know, one had a right to expect," said Mrs. Green Oldacres to Mrs.

Headlam. "It was her *métier* as an alderman's wife."

But though inhabiting the largest mansion in the Close, and considered very rich at Marshborough, Lady Page, on her husband's death, had found herself by no means possessed of the fabulous wealth we are accustomed to associate with the idea of the "Lord Mayor of great London," ever since we, in our childhood, opened our eyes and ears at the juvenile, historical, sensation novel of "Whittington and his Cat." The reason might have been that Sir William Page had never had the same opening for commerce with the Emperor of Morocco as his celebrated municipal ancestor. His fortune had been made in the wholesale grocery line, and malicious people whispered that it had not even been always wholesale.

But though the wealth of Lady Page did

not probably equal that of the widow of Sir Richard Whittington (always supposing his "master's daughter" survived him in that capacity), nor even in any near degree those of the other aldermen's wives or widows who formed her town circle, it was large for Marshborough—in fact, much the largest in the Close. But this was all as it should be. Successful grocers' shop-boys who have terminated their career as aldermen, are naturally supposed to leave their widows from a hundred thousand to half a million. The world applauds them for so doing. But let a bishop or a dean, whose father was probably a clergyman, stinting himself that his clever boy might go to school and college, and who has himself only spent his life in the instruction of the ignorant or the help of the needy, while his rival has been driving a brisk trade in figs, only leave *his* widow anything

between twenty and a hundred thousand, "What a shame!" cries the world, and all the world's newspapers, in a tremor of virtuous indignation. They can even quote Scripture against the defunct bishop, which perhaps they would hardly have ventured to do had he been alive, seeing that with that weapon he might possibly have beaten them. It is clearly the bishop's duty not to labour for the meat that perisheth.

It clearly *is* the alderman's; for though the Scriptures do not make an exception in favour of aldermen, nor indeed address the commandment especially to Bishops, it is probably an omission.

Mrs. Godfrey, then reigning at the Deanery, had been among the first of the female magnates, county and ecclesiastical, to pronounce in favour of Lady Page. The titled grocer's widow had at first found the society of Marshborough a trifle too aristocratic, but

being a wise woman who had no faith in Utopia, she discovered that it suited her better than that of her London set, who were too purse-proud.

Lady Page was quite capable of holding her own with the ladies of the Bloomshire Squires, and even with the wife of the Lord Bishop himself. She could walk out of a drawing-room before them without either assumption or awkwardness, and quite as if she had been born to it. And so by degrees everybody had given up being amused at the Lord Mayor's widow, and Lady Page became an institution in the Cathedral Close. She was the confidential friend of all the ecclesiastical ladies of that locality, from the Bishop's wife down to the wives of the minor canons.

Tennyson tells us of the village maiden who grew a noble lady, that—

“ A trouble weighed upon her,  
And perplexed her night and morn,  
With the burthen of an honour  
Unto which she was not born.”

But Lady Page was not at all perplexed, she had a certain reliance on her own good feeling, and faith in the good feeling of society collectively, which saved her from being conscious of any burden whatever. Mingled with this simplicity was a shrewdness of perception which might have made her satirical, had she not been benevolent.

Such was the friend to whom Helen Godfrey had applied for help. As I have said, Lady Page was everybody's friend as well as Helen Godfrey's. But there was nobody whom she herself liked so much as Helen. She had been full of sympathy for this last misfortune which had befallen the family, and though she had not presumed to express that sympathy to Mrs. Godfrey, to Helen she had

hinted it. Lady Page entertained much the same views of Roman Catholics that the Godfreys did. She had never really known any. Their religion appeared to her infinitely absurd. She could make some allowance for those who had been born in it; but for a pervert! he must either be a fool or a knave. Frederick Godfrey, she knew, was not a fool.

It was difficult, therefore, for her to offer much comfort, except by helping them out of the pecuniary difficulties in which the event had placed them. Even this was by no means easy. Mrs. Godfrey was not a woman mean enough to accept pecuniary obligations in one kind of spirit, or quite noble enough to accept them in another.

Helen had told her mother that Lady Page had approved of her being a governess. She had not however given a very cordial approval.



“Helen,” she had said, “I have plenty of money.”

“I am glad of it, dear Lady Page. It is wonderfully pleasant to have plenty of money.”

“And I have no children. Rich people seldom have. I should like to have boys to send to school.”

“But you have not, you see ; my mother has the boys, and you have the money. That is how good things are divided. It would not be fair for you to have everything.”

“Oh, that is how you put it. I had a notion that the boys and the money ought to go together. But I bow to yours as the higher view.”

Then she added, hesitatingly—

“I wish, Helen, you would consider me your aunt, or your god-mother, or both.”

“Indeed, Lady Page, I love you a great deal better than either my aunt or my god-

mother." Helen spoke with a grave sincerity absolutely convincing.

Lady Page laid her coarse, kind, jewelled hand on Helen's young and delicate one.

"My dear," she said, and her voice was husky; then, clearing her throat, she continued—"I said I had no boys to send to school, and that I wanted to have them. Helen, why won't you let me——" She stopped, for Helen shook her head; but she took up the hand which yet lay on hers, and kissed it. At that moment the heart of the Dean's daughter was nearly on a level with that of the grocer's widow.

"My mother would not hear of it; and besides, I am proud, and want to do this myself. The more disagreeable it is, I shall like it in one sense the better, so it is no use your representing it as disagreeable. Now, will you help me, for I know you can?"

Lady Page smiled ; she for a moment forgot her chagrin at Helen's wanting a situation in the excitement of getting one for her. Lady Page was very clever in finding situations or employés for her acquaintance, or such of her acquaintance as she approved of, according to their needs. Being somewhat chary of her services, she had a rare success in her mediation, and a genuine enjoyment in the exercise of her powers.

“Well, Helen,” she said, “since you insist upon it, I will try, if you obtain your mother's leave. But you must promise me, if you fail—I mean, if what you earn is insufficient—that you will endeavour to persuade your mother——”

“I will,” said Helen—“I really will.” But she did not at all anticipate that the money would not be enough. She knew on how little her mother could live.

Shortly after Helen was gone, Lady Page sat down to her early dinner of salmon and chicken, early codlings and Devonshire cream, daintily served by her reverential butler on snowy damask and delicate china. Early dinners, under the name of luncheons, were the rule in the Close. Kind Lady Page thought of Helen and poor Mrs. Godfrey at their dinner, and wished heartily that she could have sent them either the chicken or the salmon. She thought of how the eyes of Will and George would have sparkled, at the sight of the latter viand more especially. What a very much greater pleasure it would have been to have seen their satisfaction than to eat it herself! Why could not she send it? What a foolish world this was!

She resolved within herself that nothing, at least, should prevent her giving the boys a handsome tip when they went to school.

They should have plenty to buy glorious breakfasts for the whole "half." Nobody could object to that. Everybody tipped schoolboys. It was quite pleasant to her to think of how they would probably speak of her behind her back, as "an awfully jolly old lady."

In the meantime, she had to look for a situation good enough for Helen Godfrey. "Remember," Helen had said, "money is the main point. I can rough it, never fear."

But Lady Page did fear a little. Helen had never roughed it in any sense but that of having narrow means. Her good looks, good position, and attractive manners had made her a favourite in society. It might be different when she was to appear as poor, unknown, and dependent. She was proud, too, not only defensively, but with the pride of birth and station. Lady Page

was quite aware of this—little foible, she considered it, in her “dear Helen,” but she had found it the easier to forgive because an exception had been made in her own favour. Ere long she had heard of two situations. But let her describe them herself:—

“Now think it well over, Helen, before you make your final decision. The Higginsons are not bad people, but they will hardly suit you; and Smokeham is very unlike Marshborough. I have another friend in want of a governess, if you really are resolved to be a governess. But I fear you do not know——”

“I am quite resolved to be a governess.”

“My friend, Mrs. Law, Colonel Law’s wife, would, I know, be a mother to you. But she only offers fifty pounds.”

“That would never do. I cannot sacrifice half the income for mere pleasantness. Why

should you think I cannot bear what other people have borne?"

"I shrink from your bearing it, Helen."

"How good you are, dear Lady Page! But only try me—see if I cannot."

"The Godfrey obstinacy!" thought Lady Page to herself; but, notwithstanding, it gave her confidence.

"You say the Higginsons are not bad people?"

"But they are not gentry. He has got on by degrees. He began life as our errand-boy and shoe-black. I lost sight of him for a time, and then he re-appeared as the patentee of a superior kind of paper-bags, the manufacturing of which he still carries on. They say, too, he is a great pit-owner, and has been fortunate, I suppose, because he has been both wary and enterprising in his speculations."

"Well!" said Helen; and there must have

been a larger meaning in her looks, for Lady Page answered,

“ Yes, I was a grocer’s wife myself; but the Higginsons are not like me, my dear. I am just the same, now that I am my lady, and visit the county families, and have the Dean’s daughter for my friend, as I was when my William and I lived above our shop in Ludgate Hill. I was not so happy at the Mansion House, I am sure, with all its bustle and grandeur; though once, when I said so to Mrs. Green Oldacres, she replied, ‘ If she had been a City lady, she thought she should have liked it.’ I saw what she meant, Helen; and though she is a nobleman’s grand-daughter, I thought her a vulgar-minded woman. But we are great friends, for all that. I am quite enough of a parvenue to like visiting an Earl’s grand-daughter, and to enjoy being a Baronetess in my own person. But I see it all, my



dear, well enough ; in other folks as well as in myself. It is not because Mr. Higginson was once a grocer's errand-boy that I want you to pause before you decide, but because he is not a gentleman now."

"But he is an honest and upright man."

"I certainly believe him to be so."

"And you have said he is sensible."

"He is very far from being a fool."

"As for Smokeham being ugly, I don't care what the place is at all."

"In short, you are resolved to go?"

"Yes ; unless Mrs. Higginson is likely to be rude or unkind to me."

"She will not be unkind. You will have a richly-furnished sitting-room and bedroom, and you will fare like Dives in the parable. Mrs. Higginson will not mean to be rude to you ; but, Helen, if I know you, you would rather dine on bread and cheese, and sleep in the simplest cell, if you

could associate with people like yourself."

"Perhaps. Still, if I must do without sympathy, the privation will, on the whole, be more endurable in a luxurious sitting-room than in a cave or a cellar. Perhaps I am not so disdainful of the good things of this life as you suppose." She laughed as she spoke; then added gravely, "I only hesitate on one account. Am I worth a hundred a year? I should not like to take so high a salary without being able to offer an equivalent."

But Lady Page laughed this notion to scorn.

"My dear, if it were only for the example of your style and manners to the Higginson girls, you are worth double the money. I have told them how well-born you are, what good society you have moved in, and what a condescension it is for you to be a governess at all. They are just the sort of people

to whom one must say that kind of thing. I hate to do it. It makes me feel as if I were one of themselves. But they would never find out the kind of advantages you possess if they were not well trumpeted to them. And, you see, they think me a great authority. I actually breathe that upper air to which they are only aspiring."

And so it was finally fixed that Miss Helen Godfrey was to enter the family of John Higginson, Esquire, of Belvidere Mansion, near Smokeham, as governess to his two youngest daughters. She had a letter purporting to be from Mrs. Higginson, to inquire into her qualifications, knowledge of languages, music, and so forth, the style and manner of which were altogether that of a thoroughly well-educated person. But the tone, though polite, was slightly that of a superior. This was not unnatural; but Helen winced a little. For a moment her

heart misgave her. Could she bear it? But when she thought how much happier her mother had seemed since her resolution had been made, how she had even caught her eye fixed upon her proudly, as it used to be upon Frederick, she was indignant with herself for the momentary weakness. She showed the letter to Lady Page. That lady reddened slightly; but she only said,

“That letter was never written by Mrs. Higginson. Ethelind has written it. I suppose Ethelind is a woman now. She was only a little girl when I last saw her. She is my god-daughter.”

That evening Lady Page wrote a very energetic letter to her god-daughter, and informed her that she intended to send her a bracelet as a gift by her dear young friend Miss Godfrey.

William's gratitude to his sister, in the meantime, showed itself, not in tenderness, or

caresses, or even words themselves, but in the most uncompromising partisanship.

“I will back our Nelly against anybody for music! Nelly not find her way from one station to another! If it was another girl, perhaps—but let alone Nelly!”

Helen did not repent. True, every hour made the step feel more and more like martyrdom. But what of that? Martyrs have walked to the stake singing songs of triumph! So did she, with an occasional misgiving in her heart.

But there was another martyr in the Godfrey family, who sang no song of triumph. No applause of admiring friends had converted his passage to the arena into a triumphal march. He hardly even loved the cause to which he had offered up the sacrifice of all his heart most prized, or his ambition most coveted. With the stern Puritan sense of duty in which he had been nurtured,

and which had taken deep root in the congenial soil of his self-reliant character, he bound himself to the conclusions of a logical system as rigidly as if he had been Calvin himself. He was angered as well as broken-hearted by his mother's letter. He had so laid bare his heart to her, and she had so cruelly misunderstood him. The ex-professor, who still continued his spiritual director, had told him that if his family turned their backs upon him he must take it as a sign that heretical influence was injurious to his soul, and that God required him to give himself to Him alone. Frederick was not by nature prone to accept the conclusions of other people—was not, indeed, the kind of stuff of which devotees are made—but this advice harmonized at the moment with his own feelings ; and his new religion imposed upon him, as one of its first duties, self-distrust and obedience. He did not write ; and his

mother and Helen both believed, though his name was never mentioned between them, that he had given them up. Was he not a Catholic priest ?

Meantime, with a longing yet angry heart, he hoped and hoped against hope that a letter would come ; but the more he yearned for it, the more he resolved he would not seek it. Faith and resentment prescribed the same course. Yet, oh, for a word from home ! Any word rather than none !

## CHAPTER XII.

## THE FLY IN THE POT OF OINTMENT.

THE consent of Mr. and Mrs. Wynford had been given in due form to their son's engagement. It was not without a sigh of regret that Mrs. Wynford had made up her mind to yield up the first place in her son's heart. The good time when she should have him all to herself receded from her vision.

"Ah!" she said to her husband, "that will never be now!"

"We must be thankful to have a son we can be proud of," said the Squire, a little gruffly, perhaps because he felt it too. But



Mrs. Wynford was a cheerful woman, and inclined to look to the bright side. The sigh had no sooner expended itself than she put on her bonnet and walked across the park to the parsonage and the village, to tell the news, just as she had done when the tidings of the "honours" had arrived. Before the sun had set that evening, there was scarcely a soul in the parish that did not know that the young Squire was going to marry into the most ancient family in Bloomshire, and that the bride was the prettiest girl in England. Mrs. Wynford had a knack of putting things pleasantly, and in consequence, probably, of this knack, had almost persuaded herself, as well as everybody else, that nothing in the world could have delighted her more than her son's marriage; and that Elfrida Foxley was the bride above all others she would have chosen.

In the excitement into which she had talked

herself, she drew mental pictures of the charming furniture and dresses she should buy for her daughter-in-law. Had not Elfrida always been so very poor? She would overwhelm her with kindness and affection. Mrs. Leigh should think there was nobody in the world like her husband's mother, and no place like Thorleigh Court. She would herself take her to all the cottages, and all round the neighbourhood. She would even go to town and introduce her at Court. She would make Elfrida's existence a fairy-tale, and she herself should still remain the centre of the family life, if not the very nearest and dearest to Leigh himself.

And so all went merry as a marriage bell. I use the comparison as being orthodox and recognised rather than because marriage bells invariably seem to my own ears so full of mirth. But the season of "love's young dream" was drawing to a close, soon to be

succeeded, Leigh firmly believed, by a better time—as much better as the rich purple clusters of the ripened grapes are better than the spikes of pale green blossom which deck the tender festoons of the vine in the Spring time. But though his happiness was as near perfection as can be permitted to us in this our mortal state, yet there was one flaw in its completeness. Even here there was the fly in the pot of ointment.

Elfrida not only again went to morning prayers, which was bearable, as he accompanied her, but she had had one or two private conversations with the Rector. After these interviews it always seemed to him that her manner was cold and abstracted.

Wynford's dislike to Mr. Summerwood had increased with his love for Elfrida. Every time he met that gentleman the breach widened between them, and he

hated, in a way that was hardly to be accounted for, the influence he possessed over the girl to whom he was engaged. He chafed mentally at what he considered his patronising manner towards her, and her deference for him filled him with a rage ready to burst out on the slightest additional provocation. Not that he was jealous, in the ordinary sense of a lover's jealousy. In his eyes, as well as Elfrida's, Mr. Summerwood was almost an elderly man. It might be that, accustomed from his infancy—at least, when he was doing what was right—to have everything he did applauded and admired, the Rector's real or fancied attitude of antagonism struck him as a personal injury.

The evening before his departure had arrived; he and his betrothed were taking their last walk together in the Pleasaunce. It was late, after coffee, and they had gone

out, they said, to be cool. These were the longest days of all the year. Though nearly ten o'clock, the peaked outline of the Bloomshire hills yet rose into the light—pure as spirit and warm as sense—which served at once as a memento of the departed, and a prophecy of the coming day. The night air stirred the tree-tops like a love-whisper; and the dew fell softly on the flowers, yet faint with the heat and passion of the day. They had been walking in what, to Leigh at least, was a delicious silence.

“Elfrida,” he said, at last, out of the depths of his utter contentment, “I am so happy! Are you, my darling?”

He stopped as he spoke, and looked into her face. He had asked the question; but it was merely for the pleasure of hearing, or perhaps seeing, her answer. He was greedy of his cake on this last night.

Some words she murmured in reply, pro-

bably such as he had hoped to hear, and there was a tender, tremulous light in her great blue eyes as she stood opposite the western sky. Half wild with love and joy, he caught her to his heart, and poured into her ears words of worshipping tenderness. But that old, old story, though "piercing sweet" to the ears to which it is addressed, has a knack of sounding commonplace and high-flown when related by a third person.

"I wonder," said Elfrida, at last, with a long sigh—"I wonder if it is right to feel happy! What would Mr. Summerwood think?"

Leigh started back, at once disenchanted.

"What has Mr. Summerwood to do with us?" Wrath and indignation were in his voice.

Elfrida did not know how to answer. Vague forebodings of difficulty and pain weighed upon her timid spirit, and reflected

themselves in her countenance. It did not seem to him like the same face.

“Elfrida!” he cried, passionately, “I hate that man! He comes between you and me. He has no right, and I will not bear it! Promise me to have nothing more to do with him—never to speak to him again, but as a common acquaintance?”

She seemed to hesitate; his vehemence terrified her.

“If you love me, Elfrida,” he said, profoundly agitated.

At that moment she only feared him. And when he repeated, more calmly, but not less eagerly, “Promise me; say ‘I will not, Leigh,’” she said, trembling, but audibly, “I will not, Leigh.”

Then it seemed as if he did not know how to show sufficiently the excess of his gratitude, or the entireness of his trust. But, for Elfrida, the magic was gone. That lovers’

talk, which had been so “silver sweet,” she hardly even heard. Her poor little head was distracted with anxieties, greater far than she had strength to bear alone; but she dared not share them with her lover. Of the real nature of his character, she had not the faintest glimpse. He thought he had laid open his whole heart to her; but a heart, like the universe, may be an open secret.

There are those to whom it is for ever impossible to read either the one or the other. Could Elfrida then and there have made her promised husband her confessor, he might have been surprised and distressed, but she would have bound him to her for ever. Poor Leigh!—as it was, he thought he knew her through and through!

In the morning, at the early breakfast, Elfrida looked pale and harassed. The young man fancied it was for his sake, and



his heart swelled with love and pride. He left his breakfast almost untasted ; the broiled chicken stuck in his throat ; and the tea seemed to choke him.

“The carriage is at the door,” said the Colonel, taking out his watch ; “and though there is nothing so unpunctual as trains, even their unpunctuality cannot be depended on.”

Leigh started up.

Then it was a hurried but repeated embrace, and from Mrs. Foxley an affectionate farewell. Leigh, even amidst the engrossing nature of his own feelings, was conscious all the time of her happy looks and cordial manners. It was quite natural. She had reason to be happy. But he was grateful to her. He loved her ; he loved everybody. He could at that moment even have forgiven Mr. Summerwood. But the Colonel hurried him away to the carriage, which was waiting at the other side of the

moat. He was seated in that old-fashioned vehicle, by the side of his host, who had the reins in one hand and the whip in the other, ready to start, when suddenly, under the old Norman archway, Elfrida appeared once more, like some maiden in an old romance, to speed her parting lover.

How sweet she looked in her antique beauty amidst the shadows and coolness of the Summer morning!—like a picture of some mediæval princess, she seemed, under those grey old battlements, embroidered with moss, and fringed with wall-flower. It was all like some insubstantial vision to Leigh Wynford—the fields steeped in dew, the broken lights, the scent of the wall-flower, the shiver of the aspens—a scene

“Where nothing is, but all things seem.”

Even the cock crew like a cock in a dream. And the most unreal thing of all was Elfrida herself. He was springing from the car-

riage, to assure himself that she was a girl of flesh and blood, his very own Elfrida, when the Colonel laid upon his arm a detaining hand, gave the whip a decided smack, and off trotted, though not too quickly, the old asthmatic horse. Leigh looked behind him, till a turn in the road hid from his view the old moated house.

During all his after-life, he never heard the tremulous music of aspens, or breathed that rich fragrance of wall-flower, that that scene did not rise up before him hardly more like a dream than he had seen it then. And if for a period he never beheld it without pain and longing, there came at last a time when its beauty was stingless—when it ceased to be anything but a picture.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## UNDER THE PAGODA.

IT was a journey of many hours from Marshborough to Blackshire, and Smokeham lay on the more distant confines of the county. Smokeham was even now a large, though still a rapidly-increasing place. It formed one of a group of smaller towns and villages clustering round one of the great centres of British industry—the mother city, like the heart of the system, communicating her own life and energy to her outlying members, by means of the iron arteries which intersect the regions like a grim pattern in lacework.

It was along one of these, on a chill October morning, that the train containing Helen the Martyr was, with mighty panting and straining, urging its ponderous swiftness. The grassy pastures and tall elm-trees of Bloomshire had been long passed by. Sad as the yellowing leaves which yet hung limp on the trees, or lay on the fields in dank and rotting heaps, looked under the monotony of the bleak, sunless sky, she grieved to leave them behind, as if they had been the faces of friends. She had spent half an hour, and eaten a sandwich at the great station at Buttonborough, and now the scene was changed.

A plain lay before her, as far as the eye could reach, unbroken by tree or shrub. Nothing met her sight save wastes strewn with coal-dust, relieved by cinder-heaps, the refuse of long lines of furnaces, which could scarcely be said to diversify the prospect, as

they made but a part of the general monotony of grimness. The vegetation here and there, cropping out among the cinders and dust, was so scorched and sooty that she scarcely recognized it as vegetation at all. Like the presiding genius of the scene, here and there, at the mouth of a coal-pit, rose the weird form of a giant steam-engine, stretching out, in the shape of windlass or crane, a gaunt and blackened arm, as if to bless or to curse that abomination of industrial desolation which lay limitless around. Over this region now stretched a tent of sullen cloud, terminating all round the horizon in the long purple fringes of the falling rain.

The aspect of the world in which her new home lay was not attractive. It was, in truth, so depressing that Helen could have cried, had it been becoming in a martyr to cry. But of course it was not. So she

only sat gazing out of the window immovably, with compressed lips and dimmed sight, till a prolonged whistle ushered the train into a tunnel, and she found herself, in a few minutes, in a large and dismal station, cumbered in every direction with bars of iron great and small, and crowded with trucks loaded with coal. A man-servant, in gold and green livery,—quite a gorgeous object in that grim hall of Vulcan—accosted her with a civil inquiry if she was the young lady who was going to Belvidere Mansion, as the carriage was waiting.

It was a rather showy carriage, but handsome and well-made, with beautiful horses, and everything new, and unexceptionably fashionable—too new and fashionable, Helen thought; but then she was fastidious.

“How ostentatious,” was her first thought, “to send such a turn-out to meet me!”

But an instant’s reflection made her a little

ashamed of this notion. It might have been kindness, after all. She hoped she was not going to be touchy—the general failing of her class—yes, her class. So, admonishing herself into cheerfulness and good humour, she sat up in the luxurious carriage of the paper-bag manufacturer, and endeavoured to divert her mind once more by contemplating the outside world.

She was now driving along a nearly straight road, and it was raining hard. I have said a road, because it could hardly be called a street, though, if the reader has formed any notion of such accompaniments as shady woods or fragrant meadows, I have misled him as much by the one word as I should have done by the other. The road was bordered on both sides by a succession of villas; first in short terraces, then semi-detached; afterwards completely separate; and in many cases, as they became



more and more distant from the town, surrounded by grounds more or less extensive. But though various and fantastic in the style or no-style of their architecture, they had one aspect in common—that of newness. The road itself was new, and evidently made for the houses. The smart gateways, and trim lodges, and ornamental walls were new, and the weeping willows, and birches, and red-berried mountain-ashes which overhung the road, and shut out from the eyes of the profane the mansions beyond, were in the very infancy of arboreal existence ; as had they been human, even, there was hardly one which had yet attained the puny majority of man. Occasionally, when a break on the left hand of the traveller in the long line of streaming roofs and dripping shrubbery permitted her to perceive that there was a world beyond, she could see or guess that the features of

the rain-swept plain differed but little from those which, during her railway journey, had struck her as so weird and dreary. She was now longing to be at the end of her fatiguing day, and every larger or more important-looking house she approached must, she fancied, be Belvidere Mansion. But no ; on went the carriage, and yet on—it seemed to her interminably. Yet she had not gone more than four or five miles, and the horses were of first-rate mettle.

At last, however, they stopped in front of the finest and most pretentious entrance she had yet seen—a great tall iron gate in three compartments, with pillars between, surmounted by ornaments resembling minarets. The lodge, from which issued a liveried porter, was also lavishly adorned with minarets and domes, as if a fantastically-minded genie had sliced off the top of some structure in Moscow or Constantinople,

and dropped it in a freak upon the solid, comfortable, undeniably English building it served for a roof.

A carriage-sweep, meandering a good deal, to make it look as long as possible, between the terribly smooth-shaven lawns and trim groups of juvenile trees, soon led up to the broad gravelled terrace, adorned with urns and statues in front of the house. Helen could not avoid noticing that, even though it was gusty October, and the leaf-stalks were feebler than the frailest thread, there was scarcely a leaf to be seen on the miraculously-smooth turf, or on the weedless gravel path. The place at least had the beauty of utter neatness.

The house was simply an enormous extension of the lodge—good, plain, utilitarian, and Anglican, beneath; above, domed and minaretted almost ad infinitum. One feature, however, it possessed which was

wanting in the lodge, and which was evidently a quite recent addition to the architecture. At one corner uprose a huge gazebo, in the form of a pagoda—at least, as the pagoda was represented in the pleasant days before the war, in the Parisian “International” of 1867, the only occasion on which the writer of this humble history ever beheld a pagoda, except on a tea-pot or a punch-bowl. It was the only occasion, too, on which the paper-bag manufacturer had ever beheld a pagoda, and he at once agreed with his wife that it would be “a sweet thing” for the gazebo they had long intended to build, to serve at once the double purpose of a smoking-room and a vantage ground whence to catch a glimpse of the Bloomshire Hills.

The carriage had now stopped, and the footman had sprung down and knocked with that efficiency and decision which accom-

plished footmen alone attain to in the art of knocking. Helen's modest array of boxes was being taken down, and she herself was standing under the ogee gothic arch, surmounted by something not unlike Prince of Wales's feathers, which formed the inner doorway of the porch, and, fastidious people might have thought, was hardly in keeping with the minaret stuck upon the outside. She was angry with herself to feel that her colour was rising, and her heart beating a little faster than usual ; but while she was at once admonishing herself for this weakness, and seeing that her packages were all right, let us take a glimpse at the interior she was about to enter.

In a large, lofty, luxurious drawing-room, warmed and brightened by an immense blazing fire, sat the wife and elder daughter of the paper-bag manufacturer. The walls of this room were covered by a landscape paper—

a sort of panorama of Oriental scenery—in which palm-trees, temples, river scenes, ghauts, and swarthy, white-robed water-carriers, formed the more salient features. The pile carpet was of the thickest, and softest, and richest, though the Brobdingnagian rose-wreaths forming the pattern were so thrown into perspective as to suggest at every step the not altogether comfortable sensation of treading into a thorny hole. A magnificent grand piano, inlaid tables, consoles, chiffoniers; pier-glasses in massive frames, buhl cabinets, and china vases; each big enough to have contained one of the forty thieves doomed to destruction by the lynch law of Morgiana the strong-minded, crowded the room so as almost to impede the movement of the inmates. Still, on the bleak October day, as the leaves were whirled down on the blast, and the rain fell thick, and the fog crept up from Smokeham, that spacious

room, with its glow of firelight, and its warmth of crimson draperies, looked most comfortable and home-like.

Comfortable and homelike also looked the two ladies, who, as I have said, occupied the room. Mrs. Higginson was a middle-aged woman, fat, fair, and—at least fifty. She was indeed very fair and very fat, being in the condition of Mr. Banting before he gave up his bread and beer, if that once famous gentleman has not already vanished into the oblivion which sooner or later awaits, I was going to say greater, but I mean even more distinguished men, and so spoilt the point of my comparison. Like John Gilpin,

“On the top of her head was a wig,  
And on the top of her wig was——”

not a hat, but a cap, or, at least, the little lump of be-ribboned white lace which the present generation so denominates. Round

her ample figure hung the ampler folds of a rich dark silk dress, fashionably and not untastefully made. She had been, indeed still was, for her age and size, a handsome woman ; and whatever may be the cause, handsome women are seldom entirely devoid of taste in dress. The only fault to be found with Mrs. Higginson's now was that it was rather too rich for the occasion. This might perhaps have been one reason why she did not look like a lady. But rather, I am inclined to think it was from that subtle effluence of the hidden spirit in which we all subsist as in an atmosphere. Very different was her daughter, a tall, slim, undeniably "distinguished-looking" girl, who was now reclining in a lounging chair, with a book in her hand.

Ethelind Higginson had a striking countenance, a haughty head, quite black hair, dressed with infinite care, flashing dark



eyes, and a look altogether of character, cultivation, and confidence. She was much more like a princess than a parvenue. Her dress was in material the very simplest and plainest, but in the very newest though not extremest fashion, and of the very freshest and neatest in every minutest detail. I have said she had a book in her hand. Sometimes she appeared to be reading it with great attention, sometimes she lay back in her chair as if in thought, the book hanging listlessly down. During one of these pauses she suddenly exclaimed :

“What a nuisance this governess will be ! Why cannot Ada and Gerty be sent to school as I was ?”

Mrs. Higginson looked up from the sofa cushion she was working in gorgeous silks and wools.

“Hada, my dear, his too delicate to go from 'ome. Lady Page says this governess

is quite the lady, and haccustomed to the best society."

"I never can endure governesses. They are so formal, not only in their manners, but in their ways of thinking. Then their position is so awkward—one never knows how to treat them."

"Her ladyship says we must treat her like a lady, though, hof course, at the same time, one cannot be hexpected to forget her position. Her ladyship, 'aving hoccupied the 'igh position she does, is a hexcellent judge."

"What does she mean by treating her like a lady? You would not order her to ring the bell, or to run upstairs for your pocket-handkerchief. You might order a servant to do such things, or ask a young lady visitor, but you would neither order nor ask the governess. It is an anomalous position."

Ethel often used words her mother could not understand, but she rarely asked an explanation, as her daughter always seemed annoyed when she did. In a certain sense, Ethel ruled the whole family. She now continued :

“If she should turn out, which I don’t expect, a lady-like, clever, companionable girl, I shall forget she is a governess ; and if, as is much more likely, she should turn out a mere machine for teaching accomplishments, I shall never remember she is a lady. As to treating her in both capacities, as you propose—well, um !—let us see. Yes, I think I understand——”

Ethelind raised her book as she spoke, as if the matter were finally settled, and further discussion quite useless.

So poor Mrs. Higginson was left to chew alone the cud of an indigestible thought. It had vaguely oppressed her already ; but the

words of her daughter had given it shape and substance. Oh ! what would she have given if she too only understood ! Mrs. Higginson wished to be kind to the governess, still it would never do not to seem to know the difference in their positions. If she could only find out what ladies who were born ladies did ! The worst of it was, Miss Godfrey would know, and note her deficiencies. Why did not Ethel explain ? But she knew it was no use asking an explanation of her when she had that sort of face. She began to realise “ what a nuisance—” as Ethel had styled it—it would be to have a person always in the house with whom she could never be at ease.

Mrs. Higginson had been a much happier woman in the first flush of her husband’s prosperity, when they had only attained comfort, than she was now when increasing

wealth and political importance had given them a doubtful position in a class far above that in which education and early associations had fitted her to be happy. Unable to take her stand upon her own good sense and personal dignity, as her friend Lady Page had done, she lived in a constant dread of the breach of some of those conventionalities with which, like a magic circle, the polite world is hedged in. In company, a sudden observation would make her heart beat, and a smile would bring out heavy drops of moisture on her broad, handsome face. In the main, however, she had an unfaltering faith in the power and consequence of her wealth; and now, as she fell back upon this consolatory reflection, her ruffled thoughts grew calm, and she was restored to equanimity and self-respect.

In the growing dusk she leant back in her chair, and looked around her. The

firelight shed a ruddier hue on the rich furniture, and lighted up with a becoming glow the striking face of Ethelind, who now occupied a low stool on the hearth-rug, and was reading by the fire-light.

Yes, it was all her own, that wealth of comfort, that queenly-looking girl, of whom, though she stood a little in awe, she was extravagantly proud ; and was she not more than the equal of that poverty-stricken mother, whatever her birth might have been, whose daughter was even now on her way to occupy a dependent position in her family ? Mrs. Higginson was yet brooding with complacency over the comparison, when the opening of the outer door was followed by a heavy footfall in the hall, and the speedy entrance of the lord of the mansion himself. A big, burly, coarse-looking man, wrapped up in volumes of the finest and best-fitting broadcloth !

From his whole manner and bearing one would have decided at once that his peace of mind had never been invaded by any of the difficulties or diffidences which so often beset that of his wife. Tall, bright-eyed, red-faced, self-possessed, Mr. Higginson not only looked as if he had been a successful man, but as if he was thoroughly aware of it, and valued himself accordingly. He looked, indeed, every inch a man, though by no means a gentleman. He smiled now with satisfaction as the splendours and comforts of his home met his eye—a satisfaction worthy of sympathy, for he had worked hard and honestly. His wife's dress, too, pleased him, for he liked to see her richly-attired, and it was a liking in which she was nothing loath to indulge him. From Ethel, who inherited from himself a will of her own, he did not always obtain so ready a compliance.

“Wal, it looks comfortable here, don’t it, after a trudge in the mud, with nothing to breathe but damp and smoke?”

“Why did you not come in the carriage, along with Miss Godfrey?”

“Oh! the new governess, my lady’s paragon, you mean! Miss Godfrey!—that is her name, is it? I was ready to shut up a bit earlier than usual, you see, this afternoon, and I did not care either for sitting in the counting-house, or for going in the carriage to the station.”

“Why did not you send a fly for Miss Godfrey?” said Ethel, rising from her seat on the low stool on the hearth, and speaking with that look of superiority which, though her father admired it in her, he would hardly have brooked from anyone else.

“A fly! Well, to be sure, I daresay the poor thing is not accustomed to anything



better. The carriage will be a treat to Miss Godfrey, and the walk was a good constitutional for me!" And Mr. Higginson laughed loud, as he spoke loud.

"I daresay she 'as a ride in my Lady Page's carriage sometimes," said Mrs. Higginson, with more sympathy in her husband's kindness than was felt by her daughter; "but her ladyship, I believe, honly keeps a one-orse brougham!"

But the sound of carriage-wheels suddenly put a stop to the conversation. Mr. Higginson cast a rapid glance round the room, as if to assure himself that it was calculated to impress the governess with a due sense of his wealth and importance.

"Bless my life, Ethel!" he cried, "why are you not dressed for dinner? What is the meaning of your sitting there in that mean woollen rag?"

"It is my new shawl-dress. It is hardly dressing-time yet."

"The governess will take you for a decayed gentlewoman like herself."

"I don't care what she takes me for. The more important question is what I take her for," said Ethelind, throwing back her haughty little head, while her father chuckled over her good looks and her high spirit.

Mrs. Higginson had taken no share in this little colloquy between her husband and her daughter. She was, in fact, completely engrossed in anticipating the advent of the formidable governess. Imminent as it was, she was even yet doubtful as to how she should receive her, and got up, and sat down again, in a state of wretched indecision.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## MARTYRDOM.

HELEN GODFREY was now in the hall. The brilliant lamp and the blazing fire dazzled her eyes. Her heart still beat. This going among strangers in an inferior position was a pill not so easy to swallow. Another tall footman now threw open the drawing-room door, and announced, "Miss Godfrey!" his mistress within fervently hoping he was right in announcing a governess, but comforting herself with the reflection that "Beale would know!"

All Helen's little premeditated acts and speeches were now clean swept from her

mind, but she threw herself, not without confidence, on the suggestions of her native dignity. The subdued light of the drawing-room was a relief after the glare of the hall, the more especially that she felt the eyes of all the three occupants were upon her, scrutinizing her from head to foot.

Mr. Higginson was the first to salute the new-comer, by extending his big, brawny hand, and giving hers a hearty shake, a reception which, in spite of its want of elegance, and an over-hasty resolution to "despise these people," was a comfort to her.

"You are welcome, miss, and not the wuss, I hope, for your cold journey. Now take a chair, and have summat at once—a glass of wine, or a cup of tea."

"No, I thank you," Helen answered, returning Ethel's freezing but fairly polite bow with another of the same class.

Mrs. Higginson, now forced into action, if she would not abdicate her position as mistress of the house, but still divided between the promptings of her kind nature and misgivings about those ways of "distinguished society" in which Lady Page had said the governess was so thoroughly versed, now began :

"I hope, my—I mean, Miss Godfrey, you haven't felt cold. We 'ad our hafternoon teas about a hour ago. My maid will show you to your room, and fetch you a cup there. You mustn't say no. It will do you good. I hope you left your family well?"

Helen, in truth, was glad of the offer of tea, and as it was pressed, she only murmured something about trouble.

"Trouble!" cried Mr. Higginson—"never speak about trouble here, my dear. We

have plenty of servants, I should think ; and if not, we must get more. Ring the bell, Ethel."

Ethel rang, and Mrs. Higginson was giving directions for her maid to be sent to show Miss Godfrey to her room, when Ethel interrupted her.

"I will go with Miss Godfrey. Send Harris with the tea, and to unpack the boxes."

Helen felt she would much rather have had the maid as a conductor, but, of course, there was nothing left for her but acquiescence. In silence they passed through the spacious, brilliantly-lighted passages, and up the thickly-carpeted stairs.

Helen's bedroom was a most inviting apartment. It was lighted up by a blazing fire, and seemed to contain every luxury the most fastidious heart could desire. The picture it represented sent a glow of satis-

faction to her depressed spirits. Then Ethel opened an inner door, disclosing a sitting-room beyond, filled with the same radiance of fire-glow and plenitude of comfort. Green silk draperies contrasted prettily with furniture of polished walnut-wood. Drawings in water-colours ornamented the walls. There was a piano, a book-case filled with books, a writing-table, a sofa, and an easy-chair, all of the most luxurious description.

“The children will have their lessons here,” said Miss Higginson, “at such hours as my mother and you arrange. Unless to go out to walk occasionally, you will not have much more trouble with them, as they have a couple of nurses—one an old, confidential person, who has been with us all our lives.”

This was good news, but though it was meant to be graciously delivered, Miss Hig-

ginson's manner was certainly patronising—almost condescending.

“There are books—tales and poetry, and a few other popular works; and if you want books of a more profound class, you will find some in the library down stairs.”

As Ethelind spoke, her eye ran over the new-comer with a look which seemed to add—“But I don't suppose you will.” Helen, who was a good German scholar, applied to it in her own mind the untranslatable German adjective, “*naseweis*,” and was indignant accordingly. And yet she was mistaken. Ethelind meant to be charming. But it rarely entered her head to imagine that anybody could be as clever as herself, and she fancied Helen must be delighted with the attention she was paying her.

The maid had now arrived with the tea.

“Unpack Miss Godfrey's things,” said Ethelind. “The gong will sound when



dinner is on the table, and you will find us in the drawing-room." So saying, Ethel went to dress.

On going down stairs, she found her father and mother discussing Miss Godfrey.

"A nice, good-tempered, sensible-looking lass!" was Mr. Higginson's approving verdict.

"She is none so distinguished hand haris-tocratic-looking as my lady said," rejoined Mrs. Higginson, in a tone partly of relief, partly of disappointment.

"And none the worse for that," rejoined her husband with loud approval. "A natural, unaffected girl will be a deal pleasanter in the house than any of your fine stuck-up madams."

"She is a lady," said Ethelind decisively ; "but not much in her, and something a little ungracious about her, I fancy. But I daresay it is shyness. No doubt everything

here is very different from what she has been accustomed to."

This was a pleasant view of the case to Mrs. Higginson ; but that there should not be "much in her," was not so agreeable.

"Dear me ! My lady said she was so haccomplished—languages, music——"

"Oh ! as to languages and music, Lady Page would not deceive you. She is all right there, I make no doubt, and will teach all the better because she is not over-clever. A governess ought not to be eccentric, and the attractions of genius seldom fail to produce oscillations from the ideal orbit."

Neither father nor mother could in the least understand this illustration, but perhaps they admired it all the more.

"Well done, Ethel !" said her father, "it would not do to expect all girls to be as clever as yourself, and two of you together might not answer ;" and he laughed partly

at his own wit, and partly in admiration of his daughter.

But at that very moment, and just as the gong sounded, the governess herself came into the room, and no more could be said.

Mr. Higginson took her in to dinner himself. It was quite a splendid entertainment, such as Helen was accustomed to see at the parties of the Bloomshire squires, but which they were not in the habit of indulging in in daily life. Mr. Higginson pressed her rather too ostentatiously to partake of the delicate food and the rich wines ; telling her she did not know how good they were, and urging her to make herself at home. Mrs. Higginson, too, who grew calm as she allowed herself to contemplate the ingenuous countenance and simple manners of her new inmate, had subsided, by the time dinner was over, into her natural homely self. In

the drawing-room she called Helen "my dear," made her rest in an easy chair with a stool under her feet, and grew quite confidential over the effects of fatigue, and her own sensations during railway journeys. She had seated herself by the governess, while Ethelind had established herself apart with a book, which she read diligently. Miss Godfrey's pupils were then brought in, to be introduced to their new governess before going to bed.

They were both of them plump and fair, like their mother; whereas, making every possible allowance for the immense difference in style, age, and sex, Ethelind had the tall figure, dark eyes, and decided manner (the manner which redeemed him from utter vulgarity) of her father. The little girls looked good-natured like their mother, rather than distinguished like their sister. They held up their faces at once on the

introduction to kiss their new governess.

Mrs. Higginson herself conducted Helen to her bed-room at night.

“Tell your mother, my dear,” she said, “that she may be quite heasy habout your ‘ealth’s being seen to, and hall that. Hi am a mother myself. Hand now I wish you good night. We shall hall be very ‘appy together, I am sure.”

Helen took the fat, be-jewelled hand, but could not speak, for something seemed to stick in her throat. Had she met Mr. and Mrs. Higginson at any previous period of her life, she would have thought them unendurably vulgar, and have despised them utterly. Now their kindness, though coarse, was comforting.

Miss Higginson was a lady—yes, she was a lady; but at this moment the fastidious Helen far preferred the vulgarity of the parents to the refinement of the daughter.

In a vague whirl of thought, in which railway-stations, industrial deserts, giant steam-engines, vulgar faces, and one figure, proud, and, as it always seemed, antagonistic, appeared to move about, like a shifting pattern on a groundwork of intense physical comfort, she fell fast asleep. Thus, with her head on a down pillow trimmed with lace, terminated the first day of Helen's martyrdom.

## CHAPTER XV.

## A BROKEN PROMISE.

I FIND, in relating the consummation of Helen Godfrey's martyrdom, I have far outstripped in time the progress of many events connected with my narrative.

Elfrida Foxley was not happy on that Summer morning when she stood under the grey battlements and saw her lover drive away. He had vanished round the leafy corner, and she was still standing motionless, with her eyes fixed on the spot where he had disappeared, when she felt her mother's arm encircle her with unusual tenderness.

“He will soon be back, dearest. Oh! Elfrida, you are the most fortunate girl in the world!”

Mrs. Foxley's eyes swam with tears of joy. But Elfrida was too much engrossed with her own feelings to have any perception of her mother's; so, with an absent kiss, she slipped from her embrace and took refuge in her own room.

Mrs. Foxley felt as if she could have cried again, but not with joy. She felt as the birds and the butterflies must feel when on a glorious May day the east wind again begins to blow.

It was nearly their early dinner-time when her husband returned. He came back in the highest spirits. Never since those old days when he had been in love with herself had she known him so happy or so loquacious. He praised Leigh, exulted in Elfrida, and seemed as if he could not



weary of enumerating the advantages of the "alliance."

"It would restore Elfrida to the position to which her birth entitled her, and which she seemed born to grace. No more mortifications, and cold shoulders, and pinchings, and strivings, and anxieties, for her at least!"

Till that moment Mrs. Foxley had never known how much her husband had felt such things—hardly understood that he had felt them at all. Now, in this moment of relief, she began to appreciate the fortitude with which he had borne them, and through which he had worn so brave a face. But the exuberance of his spirits fell upon hers like an additional blast of the east wind. She could not bear to bring a shadow over the first flush of his joy. And it might be all her own fancy. So she tried to smile and to look happy too.

At dinner Elfrida did not come down till she was sent for. This her mother knew to be a bad omen. There was, too, the old look in her face which she had so much dreaded to see.

“Elfrida must be desperately in love,” said her father to his wife when they were again alone. “Leigh is going to write to her to-night. It will be all right in the morning, when the letter comes. That young fellow would give his life for our Elfrida. It makes one feel quite young again to see them, Rose.”

From this speech “Rose” perceived that a faint penumbra of the coming shadow had extended itself to his mind.

The next morning Elfrida rose early and went off to morning prayers. Mr. Summerwood could scarcely be said to see her come in to church, in fact, he only caught a glimpse of the feather of her hat, but he felt her ar-

rival all over. He, however, was not going to make any advance. At this crisis, proud as he was, he would have grovelled in the dust at her feet, could he have so obtained her for himself. But he knew that was not the way, so he did not even hurry to lay aside his alb and cassock, but lingered rather longer in the vestry than usual. As he expected, she was loitering about in the churchyard when he came out. He lifted his hat, and wished her good morning politely, seeming as if he would have passed on. As he expected, she stopped him.

“Mr. Summerwood, I wish so much to speak to you—to consult you—I mean, as my spiritual director.”

He looked at her, and noted how her face wore that old expression of nervous terror which he remembered in the early days of his directorship, but which, under his tutelage, had given way to that look of innocent

abstraction, or saintly repose, which had so much struck the two young men in the Sheldonian Theatre.

“I am at your service, Miss Foxley,” said the Rector. As he spoke he saw that she grew pale, and that her breath came quickly. He exulted in a consciousness of power at all times, but never had he exulted so much as now.

Mr. Summerwood was not the man to let the grass grow under his feet, or to hesitate to strike while the iron was hot. He did not, therefore, appoint a time for receiving Elfrida's confession or her confidence. He conducted her at once to the Rectory, and into his study. It was not the regular way of doing things, and nobody liked the regular way better than Mr. Summerwood ; but in that he dared to apply exceptional methods to exceptional circumstances, he showed one ingredient of greatness.

He was hardly prepared for what she had to say. It went far beyond his wildest guesses. That Leigh Wynford, a mere upstart boy, should have presumed to speak of him in such terms, should have dared to forbid Elfrida's intercourse with him. Good Heavens! But he controlled the outward expression of vengeful wrath—righteous indignation he called it—which was blazing within him.

“And now,” sobbed Elfrida, “I have broken my promise in speaking to you at all; but, oh! the burden on my conscience was so fearful! What a night I have had! What am I to do?—what am I to do?”

In her agony of fear and doubt, with her excited countenance raised to his, and her great blue eyes wild with terror, she looked, it seemed to him, lovelier than he had ever seen her. Never before in his life had he

found it more difficult to continue master of himself and his position.

“How am I,” he said curtly, “to continue the spiritual adviser of a woman whose future husband has forbidden her to have any intercourse with me? It is a wife’s duty to obey her husband. Pardon me, Miss Foxley, but I must resign my position as your spiritual director.”

In making this announcement, he had calculated rightly. In a sort of despair, Elfrida wept, prayed, entreated him not to desert her. But he was obdurate. At last she cried passionately,

“I shall never know another happy moment! Oh, that I had never seen him! It was all so peaceful when he came. I might have been so happy at Nunfield!”

“And your happiness now is bound up in Mr. Wynford?”

As he asked the question his heart seem-

ed to stand still; but not a tone or a feature betrayed how breathlessly he hung upon her answer.

“It seemed very nice to be loved,” she said, with the simplicity of a child.

“Nice to be loved!—was that all?—nice to be loved!” He breathed more freely. She was very babyish. But he loved her all the better. He made no answer, and she continued :

“And papa and mamma say it is the best thing in the world for me.”

“Oh, of course they think it the best thing!” thought Mr. Summerwood to himself with scarcely warrantable indignation at the worldliness of Colonel and Mrs. Foxley, seeing that he was not incapable of worldliness of the like nature himself. But then with him the motive would have been “the good of the Church;” theirs was only the good of their child. But all he said was :

“The wishes of parents ought to weigh with a child, provided they do not thwart the will of God or his Church.”

She started and looked at him like a frightened bird.

“I was very happy at first—till I began to think—oh, Mr. Summerwood!” she broke out passionately, “it is cruel of you not to tell me what to do.”

Then he spoke with that calmness so potent over a weak, timid, and irritable temperament.

“I feel for you deeply, dear Miss Foxley, but I can do nothing for the wife of a man who has forbidden her to have anything to do with me.”

“But I am not really his wife—not yet. He had no right—I know he had not—and I will not submit to it!”

“He has some right, if you are really engaged to him; and when you are married it



will be your duty to obey him ; and the more certainly your duty that you do not marry him with your eyes shut, or with a mistaken view of his character." Elfrida started, as if in terror.

" I had not time to think. I have not had a happy moment since. I ought to have had time. I will tell him so. I will rather give him up than be miserable for ever. I will write to-day. Oh, Mr. Summerwood ! I do not consider myself engaged—not now."

At last he spoke :

" It seems to me you have acted with great precipitation. The advantages of the match have tempted you, and you have wished to please your parents. But what shall it profit you, Miss Foxley, if you gain the whole world and lose your own soul ?"

" Oh, I will give him up ; I will give it all up !" she cried, pale and trembling.

“No, that would only be repeating your fault. See if you can reconcile your union with Mr. Wynford to your obedience to the Church, to the safety and peace of your soul. Suppose, Miss Foxley, you pay another visit to Nunfield. There, there will be no one to throw an influence into the world’s scale; and I shall not be there to excite Mr. Wynford’s suspicion of unfair means.”

There was a sneer in his last words which did not quite escape even Elfrida. It gave her a vague notion that Wynford was somehow or other a very reprehensible character.

What Mr. Summerwood thought, God thought. Like a message from Heaven she hailed his proposal to go to Nunfield, and overwhelmed him with thanks.

“She does not love him,” said Mr. Summerwood, as he watched her down the gravel path which led to the gate of the

Rectory. He congratulated himself on the manner in which he had borne himself through the trying interview. He felt that his conduct had been all that became a man and a gentleman, and a priest—a contrast to that of Leigh.

I will not stop to relate the dismay of Mrs. Foxley when her daughter informed her that she wished to go to Nunfield for a short visit. “She had had a letter from Miss Blagrove, the Lady Superior, enclosing a pressing invitation.” Ostensibly, Elfrida was asking her parents’ leave to go, but her mother knew by a faint, to other ears, perhaps, imperceptible quaver in her voice, that she was ready to be ill if permission were refused. But while she silently acquiesced in the ready consent given by her father, she could not refrain from saying :

“I should have fancied you would have preferred the company of your parents to

that of strangers during the last few weeks of your unmarried life."

Tears sprang to Elfrida's eyes. "Mamma never feels for me!" she thought.

"It is not unnatural, Rose, dear," said the Colonel, "that Elfrida should wish to bid good-bye to her friends. But don't stay long, my pet."

Elfrida was touched by her father's indulgence. "Ah!" she thought, "if mamma would only feel for me, I should like to tell her all. But she would only laugh at me, or snub me—I know she would."

Miss Blagrove's prompt invitation had of course been the result of a letter written by Mr. Summerwood, in which he had represented Elfrida's engagement as one which had been entered into from worldly motives only. And in saying this he had taught himself to believe it. Mr. Summerwood was never a conscious hypocrite, and re-

spected, as well as believed in, himself.

Now Miss Blagrove had long been of opinion that the most suitable destiny that could befall Elfrida Foxley was to be well married to some well-off, common-place, pious man. She was hardly suited to a higher destiny. Still there was a great want of "sisters" at Nunfield. To supply this want was at this moment an important item in the existence of the Lady Superior. Elfrida was very gentle and very lovely, and might possibly find a place in the nursing department, or in teaching the smallest children in the orphanage, supposing her affections were really not engaged, and that her lover was as undesirable as Mr. Summerwood represented him.

Miss Blagrove had more serious views of the sanctity of a love-troth than Mr. Summerwood. She shrank from being an instrument in inflicting upon any human being

the agony of disappointed affection. She would be guided in the matter by the "leadings of Providence," she said to herself; by which she meant that she would be guided entirely by her own judgment.

In the world of "the Church," Miss Blagrove was, as yet, a greater personage than Mr. Summerwood. The Rector of Willesmere by no means intended that they should always occupy these relative positions. As a man, it was, of course, open to him to pass her. Then he would patronise her. In the meantime, to be known as the friend and counsellor of Miss Blagrove—to be recognised as having been instrumental in establishing that pious and well-known institution of which she was the well-known head, and which was formed without a flaw on the true mediæval model, was certainly a feather in his cap. It was one of the various steps by which he hoped to climb the Alp of pro-

fessional success. Eagerly as his eyes were fixed on the glittering, sunlit summit, he never forgot for a minute the dangers which lay between—the ice-slips, the crevasses which might beset an unwary or mistaken step, or even the mighty avalanche of some popular disapprobation which might overwhelm him when he least expected it. Yet he was not a humbug. He meant to succeed, but he meant to give real hard work for his success.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## MODERN - MEDIÆVAL.

NUNFIELD, or St. Prisca's Home, was situated just out of the town of Smokeham, in Blackshire. It was not, however, on the same side of the town as that large mansion with the cupolas and pinnacles, which owed its existence to successful enterprise in the matter of paper-bags ; but quite in the opposite and less aristocratic quarter. Nunfield House had been built by subscription, the Lady Superior herself having bestowed on that, and on the endowment, the chief part of her fortune, which was considerable. It was a not very exten-



sive gothicised structure, in the "decorated" style. But, though architecturally good, it was wholly wanting in that cheerful gravity and venerable shadiness which seem appropriate to the abode of religious recluses. It stood in the midst of a trim but tasteless garden, surrounded with a new brick wall coped with stone, and was planted with lilies and narcissus, and other flowers, evidently selected on the principle of being suitable for Church decoration. The tall white lilies were now in blossom, looking as fair and virgin-like as they could be expected to do in that atmosphere of black smoke and almost blacker dust. The beds were separated by narrow gravel paths, bordered with low-clipped box ; and a few saplings, which did not seem to thrive, were planted here and there. Altogether the aspect of the place was new and raw, giving to the black-drapèred mediæval figures, which were

occasionally to be seen moving about in the weary glare of the terrace walk, the look of a mistake and an anachronism.

Such was the outward aspect of the place to which Elfrida Foxley repaired for holy meditation and ghostly advice. She did not, like a high-born damsel in the days of old, approach the convent-gates on a milk-white palfrey, attended by squire or serving-man ; or make her more humble entrance as a lowly penitent on foot, with peas (unboiled) in her shoes. Her arrival, if attended with less romantic circumstances, was more in keeping with her "mother age." In fact, she rattled up from the railway-station in a cab of that dustiest and dirtiest species sacred to the "*service spécial du chemin de fer*," with a greasy Jehu on the box, and a trunk, covered with canvas neatly bound with red, on the top. She was received in the private sitting-room of the

Lady Superior—a great distinction, the sisters thought.

Elfrida threw herself into Miss Blagrove's arms. She received her warmly, but with few words or feminine demonstrations. As Elfrida looked into her calm, handsome face, and felt her clasp at once tender and firm, virtue seemed to pass into her feebler nature.

“It will be all right now!” she cried, as if a heavy weight had been lifted from her mind. And so there had—the weight of personal responsibility.

Miss Blagrove herself then conducted Elfrida to the very top of the house, to the little room she had occupied on her former visits. It was neat but bare, being furnished only with the simplest necessities; and except that the washing utensils were not pewter, and that there was a crucifix on the wall, had little to distinguish it from a cell

in a penitentiary. It was lighted by a narrow slit of a window, high up in the wall, from which, when Elfrida stood on tiptoe, her eye might be regaled by the sight of smoky chimneys, of all heights and dimensions, above and below her. Down in the depths of a sea of smoke and dust, she could also see, when she stood on a chair, the roofs of furnaces, and factories, and cottages, and the black road wriggling in and out like a monstrous snake, till it was lost in the sooty desert which lay dim around in the blazing light of a July sun.

She had originally chosen this room herself, in the first fervour of her religious joy, as an act of self-denial, and because she believed it would please Miss Blagrove; and had only felt the more confident in her act of faith when her mother had answered, on her explaining the motives which had determined her choice,

“And so they think at Nunfield that God is best pleased with those who refuse to admire his handiwork!” It was very sad that anybody should have an opinion differing from the opinion of Nunfield!

Elfrida feared that Leigh Wynford, too, was guilty of this wickedness. Had he not forbidden her to consult Mr. Summerwood? She was burning to pour her difficulties into the ear of the Lady Superior, and would have liked to begin then and there; but the Lady Superior could not listen to her at that moment.

Miss Blagrove was a woman who did everything by rule. She had her hour for charities, her hour for instructions, her hour for receiving private confessions. Yet Miss Blagrove was not naturally a cold woman. She had in her youth—and she was not yet old—had a full share of the passionate aspirations natural to an eager and ambitious

temperament. Gifted both with beauty and fortune, and completely her own mistress, she had, notwithstanding these advantages, met with a disappointment in an attachment she had formed. If the earth had opened to swallow her, if the clouds had burst in hailstones of fire on her head, she could not have been more astonished, and would probably have been less dismayed. It was anguish to her passionate heart—humiliation to her proud spirit.

But Harriet Blagrove was young and vigorous, both in body and mind. She neither died nor went mad. But from that time forth she gave up all ideas of love and marriage. On her retentive nature an impression once made was like an engraving on brass. As she began to revive she felt herself powerfully attracted by certain High Church and Ritualistic views, more especially as these were set forth by Messrs. Summer-

wood and Bignell, two devoted curates in the parish where she then lived. The system, and the outward adornment of the creed, they so zealously advocated commended themselves at once to her methodical mind and romantic taste.

Mr. Summerwood, not a little elated by the opportunity thus presented, had originated the scheme of the Nunfield Sisterhood as a proper "sphere" for the piety and talents of his new convert. But such an undertaking, Harriet Blagrove felt, was not to be lightly entered upon. For years she devoted her whole existence to qualifying herself for it. She had studied and worked at home and abroad; she had visited the poor, and the sick, and the sinful; she had nursed in hospitals; she had taught in schools; she had trained her mind and her body with an ardour which never flagged. At last she was ready; St. Prisca's Home

was built, and before Mr. Summerwood, as an acknowledgment for his services, had accepted from a kindred-minded Bishop the living of Willesmere, he had the satisfaction of seeing his pet scheme fairly inaugurated. In spite of much opposition, or perhaps because of it, it had been a success.

The ignorant had been taught, the naked had been clothed, the wretched had been comforted. In the stifling alleys and brawling back-slums of Smokeham, a humanizing influence had made itself felt.

Miss Blagrove had now been for many years Lady Superior of St. Prisca's Home. But the Lady Superior was a very different person from the heart-stricken girl who had writhed under the agony of which she was too strong to die. Neither was she the same as the enthusiastic and obedient neophyte of Messrs. Summerwood and Bignell. She was now a self-possessed, commanding,



some said arrogant, woman. The power which had been committed to her had been good for many, but it might have been a question whether it had been good for herself. Kind almost beyond kindness to those who saw with her eyes, and were submissive to her will, she was apt to regard difference of opinion as heresy, independent action as contumacious perversity.

Hitherto Elfrida had only seen the softer side of Miss Blagrove. Admiring and obedient as the haughtiest heart could wish, she had never yet frustrated the Lady Superior by that *vis inertiae*, that soft irrationality, which is a *pièce de résistance* almost invincible. It is easier to cleave a steel helmet than a down pillow. The only example on record of the latter feat, as far as I know, is that recorded by Scott, of the famous Sultan Saladin and his curved and dull blue scimitar.

The evening, Miss Blagrove had appointed for her conference with Elfrida. Elfrida would have chafed at the delay, had it been her mother, or even her lover. To a decree of Miss Blagrove she at once submitted.

Behold her, then, while the soft and golden twilight of the Summer evening gave a kind of poetry even to the chimneys and the smoke, pouring out her soul to the Lady Superior! A rambling, not very lucid narrative, by any means! But Miss Blagrove sat with her arm round the trembling girl's waist, and Elfrida leant her head on her shoulder. She felt protected, safe.

"He has written to you?" said Miss Blagrove.

"Yes. Here is his letter. I have not answered it yet," and she handed it to her friend.

Miss Blagrove took the letter without hesitation. She would not have approved of everyone reading such a letter, even when offered ; but she, of course, was an exception. The scene of the confession was Miss Blagrove's private room on the ground-floor. It was getting dusk, so she walked to the window, the more easily to read it.

She was more interested by the letter than she had expected, from Mr. Summerwood's account of the writer. Every word had the ring of true feeling. Every sentence was full of the unconscious poetry of real passion. So single-minded a letter is a rare thing. Harriet Blagrove felt that it was a convincing letter ; and she experienced a momentary impulse of contempt towards the woman who could receive it and think only of herself and her own happiness.

“ If anyone had so loved her ! ”

But it was better as it was. Powers such

as she was gifted with would have been wasted upon one, however appreciated. She had long acknowledged this. Had she not accepted her loftier destiny with rejoicing? If it was less human—was it not more divine?

Harriet Blagrove had put her hand to the plough, and she would not even *look* back. But the Lady Superior did not feel quite so softly towards Elfrida as she had done before reading the letter.

“I think,” she said, “the young man is very fond of you.”

“Yes,” said Elfrida, almost equally without vanity and without tenderness. “But he was very hard on me too. He should not have made me promise to give up Mr. Summerwood?”

“Did you promise this?”

“Mr. Summerwood said it was a promise he had no right to exact,” Elfrida answered, sheltering herself behind what she conceived

to be the impregnable stronghold of Mr. Summerwood's opinion. She had expected Miss Blagrove to applaud her for breaking it.

"If he had no right to exact it, you had still less to make it, unless you intended to keep it. Why did you not refuse?"

Elfrida burst into tears. Miss Blagrove seemed much harsher than Mr. Summerwood.

"Oh! I did not dare. He seemed so angry; and I was so frightened! I had such a miserable night; I can do nothing right. Oh! I am so unhappy! I wish I had never seen him! Oh! dear, reverend mother, won't you advise me? I thought you would have helped me! You are always so good and wise."

Elfrida's flattery was as single-minded as her selfishness. The simple girl had assailed Miss Blagrove on her weakest side. The

Lady Superior, who had been standing ever since she had returned from the window, in rather a severe attitude, now sat down again beside her penitent.

“Tell me,” she said gently, “is he a good young man?”

“Oh! I am afraid not. He does not care at all about daily service, or Saints’ Days, or anything. He might lead me away. I am afraid he is very worldly.”

“Could you be happy with him, do you think?”

“I thought I could when—at one time. But I feel now I could not be happy, uncertain about my soul. No grandeur of this world could make up to me for that.”

“Grandeur of this world!” repeated the Lady Superior, with a sort of contemptuous compassion. She was unaffectedly convinced that she despised all worldly grandeur. Yet no absolute monarch was ever fonder of

power—not the most ambitious minister ever more dearly loved place and observance. Harriet Blagrove, like many a pious notoriety, who has only loved the praise of the saints, and fancied it was not the praise of men, quite forgot that the Church was *her* world!

“Was that,” she continued, “why you thought of marrying Mr. Wynford?”

“Oh, it was very wrong! I know it was,” hastening to deprecate her friend’s displeasure, the source of which she partly mistook; “but it was not altogether for that reason. It was nice to be loved, and he is nice-looking. How could I know he was not pious?”

“Have you written to him since you received that letter?”

“I have never written to him at all.”

“Then write to him at once; tell him you have broken your promise. Say whatever

else your own heart suggests—only speak the truth. Deceive him no longer.”

“Oh! but what will my father say if I give him up? He will be so angry!”

“Does your father know about your broken promise?”

“Oh no—no. Papa thinks so much about keeping a promise—far more than he thinks about being pious. Mr. Summerwood says one is not bound to keep a promise to do wrong.”

“But you are bound to tell your father about having broken yours. What I advise you now is, to write both to him and to Mr. Wynford.”

Miss Blagrove rose, decidedly to show that the interview was terminated.

“Now go to your room and write,” she said.

When Elfrida was gone, Miss Blagrove sat for about five minutes thinking. She



neither quite understood nor quite approved of the part Mr. Summerwood had taken in the matter. Just as he seemed to have a prejudice against Elfrida's lover, Miss Blagrove felt an attraction towards him.

"Poor fellow!" she said to herself, as she thought of his letter, and of that which Elfrida had gone to write. But she did not question her own decision that it was the right thing to do.

"Men never suffer like women," was the thought with which she dismissed the subject from her mind. She had many more important matters to think of. She had given more than enough time to this.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## CHOOSE NOW.

ELFRIDA had written the letters, as she had been commanded. They had not been written without much pain and struggle. But of the pain and struggle they had cost, the idea of what either of the recipients might suffer formed no part. Elfrida's feelings were acute and strong, but the sweep of her imagination was small, and extended only to their anger with herself. She was relieved when the letters were gone—she even experienced something like the glow of triumphant conscience.

But the next day fear re-asserted its

dominion? What would her father say? What would Leigh say? Who would stand by her? Oh! how should she bear it? She had never been able to obtain another private word with Miss Blagrove. This friend, on whom she had counted as a tower of strength, had not upheld her as she had reckoned on her doing. It seemed very hard. But she durst not complain. The Lady Superior was not the mere fallible mortal her father and mother were.

On the second day after the departure of the letters, when answers in some shape might be expected, she had worked herself into a sort frenzy of apprehension. She had eagerly, and against the rules, followed the Lady Superior after breakfast, and begged her not to leave her alone; but with a certain degree of asperity the reverend mother had told her she had important work to do, and

bidden her compose her mind by prayer and meditation.

But Elfrida could neither pray nor meditate. She could only feel wicked and anxious and ill-used. Oh, how dreadful it was to be alone! How could Miss Blagrove be so cruel? And she sobbed like a disappointed child. Then, like a child tired of crying, she sat and looked at the crucifix, and the little bare pallet; and her eyes wandered to the tops of the dingy red chimneys, which she could just see, where she sat, rising above the window-sill—the thick black smoke blurring and darkening the blue glitter of the sky. She looked at the smoke a long time, for the soft curling motion was more endurable in its changeful monotony than the irritating stillness within the cell.

At last the door opened, and, to Elfrida's infinite relief, Miss Blagrove appeared. Elfrida threw her arms round her.

“I am so glad you are come ! Oh, thank you—a thousand times !”

“Elfrida, Mr. Wynford is here, and wishes to see you alone.”

The colour forsook the poor child's very lips, and the aspens by the moat did not tremble more violently when the west wind blew. Miss Blagrove thought she was going to faint. She made her sit down on the low bed, and put water to her lips.

“I cannot go alone. You must come with me ! Won't you come with me, dearest mother ?”

Miss Blagrove took her hand. The firm, tender clasp was re-assuring.

“My dear, you had better see him alone, I am sure. My poor child ! Be true to God and to yourself, and you have nothing to fear.”

“Oh, I cannot feel so ! He was so angry that night when he made me promise ; and

now he knows I have broken my word. What did he say? What did he say to you?"

"He said he had no communication for anyone but yourself—that he wished to see you at once and alone."

"But I cannot go alone. I dare not go alone! It will kill me—I know it will kill me!"

She clung to Miss Blagrove as she spoke, with nervous eagerness. Miss Blagrove stopped to ask herself if Leigh Wynford could really be so harsh and violent as Elfrieda's agony of dread seemed to imply. He had looked haughty, and there was an indignant sparkle in his eye. But she had liked his face, notwithstanding—liked it perhaps none the worse for these manifestations.

"I think you ought to comply with his request, if you can. But at all events you must see him. Every moment you delay

adds to the difficulty. Come, lean on me."

With persuasive firmness Miss Blagrove led Elfrida down-stairs. She stopped as they approached the door of the reception room, but Elfrida clutched spasmodically at her arm. She was evidently unable to support herself. Very unwillingly, but under a strong sense of necessity, Miss Blagrove bore her into the room, withdrawing behind her, as far as Elfrida's tight grasp would permit of the backward movement.

Leigh Wynford was standing at the window, his eyes fixed on the white lilies in the sunny glare of the convent garden. But, though his eyes were fixed on the lilies, he did not see them. His heart was hot within him. A passion of impatience fired his brain. He turned with a start at the opening of the door. At first he saw nothing but Elfrida. How wonderfully beautiful she looked!—her great blue eyes distended, her delicate

cheek flushed with a shell-like pink, and her hair rippling about her forehead and neck in sunny wavelets! His first impulse was to clasp her to his heart. It was on his lips to bid her tell all to him, and he would love and comfort, and, if need were, forgive her. If she would only trust him!

He had made one eager stride towards her, then he suddenly checked himself. He perceived Miss Blagrove; his arms fell, and his face darkened.

"I expected to have seen Miss Foxley alone."

Harriet Blagrove was far too proud a woman to excuse herself.

"You can see her alone now," she said.

But Elfrida still clung to her, though she visibly endeavoured to disengage herself.

The blood rushed red to Leigh Wynford's face, then as suddenly left it, white and scared.



“Elfrida,” he said, “what is it you fear?”

“Oh! don’t be so angry, Leigh! I ought never to have promised. Ought I, Miss Blagrove?—ought I, dear, reverend mother?”

“Elfrida, I have no wish to hear this lady’s opinion. No human being has a right to interfere between you and me.”

He glared as he spoke almost savagely at Miss Blagrove. But she was mistress of the position, difficult as it was. She answered gravely, and not without a certain sweetness.

“I have, indeed, no right to interfere, and no wish.”

For the first time he looked full in her face. It was impossible not to believe her. Then he turned to Elfrida, stern with the pain and passion of the moment.

As Elfrida met that perturbed counte-

nance she grasped eagerly at her friend's robe.

“Don't leave me!—oh! don't leave me!”

Her whole face and figure were instinct with terror.

Leigh made an effort to speak with calmness. His eyes were hot and his voice hoarse.

“Stop, Miss Blagrove! One moment grant me; that will be enough.” Then, turning to Elfrida, “Choose now! One or other of us give up for ever! Her or me?”

Miss Blagrove turned sharply and determinedly away to the door. Leigh stood with his arms sullenly folded. Elfrida stole one frightened glance at his face, steeled to repress feelings of the real nature of which she had not even a glimpse. All he had said or done seemed a confirmation of the

tyranny and impiety with which her fears had been teaching her to credit him. She sprang after Miss Blagrove.

“Take me with you!” she cried. “I dare not stay! I ought not to have promised!”

She clung round the Lady Superior, as if she were her last hold on salvation, which indeed she believed her to be.

“Mr. Wynford!” said the latter, in a deprecating tone.

“Madam, I have nothing more to say.”

The words seemed to choke him.

The door closed upon them both.

Then Leigh turned again to the window, and, grasping hard at the grating which ran across the lower panes, he uttered a sharp, low cry.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## AT THE PAPER-BAG MANUFACTURER'S.

HELEN GODFREY had now been for some time domesticated in the luxurious abode of the paper-bag manufacturer. On the whole she was happy, and had even begun to consider Belvidere Mansion in the light of a home. Ada and Gertrude were amiable, idle, but not stupid little girls, who were always coaxing for holidays, and escaping from their teacher whenever they possibly could, with a view either to running wild in the grounds, or to erecting steam-engines constructed out of newspapers, in the school-room, for the purpose of rais-

ing coal out of imaginary coal-pits. Once, indeed, they had made a coal-pit of chairs piled upon each other, with a square hollow formed by the backs in the centre. From the top of this they had endeavoured, by means of a piece of whipcord, to draw up the coalscuttle full of coals; but the rope giving way, there had been one heterogeneous smash of chairs, scuttle, coals, and children, which had led to the prohibition of all such unladylike amusements for the future. Poor Mrs. Higginson was often in dismay at what she considered the plebeian habits of the children, and evidently feared they were an outcome of hereditary qualities which would infallibly brand them in the eyes of those born in the purple of gentility.

“Gerty, my dear, going hout to the garden without your gloves? Ladies never go out without their gloves—do they, Miss Godfrey?”

Miss Godfrey muttered something incomprehensible. She sympathised with poor Gerty, and felt that, at her age, she would have felt it a hardship to play in gloves. But everything at Belvidere Mansion, except by Ethelind, who was a law to herself, was done with the strictest propriety. People were ladylike by maxim, and refined by rule.

Helen had been used to strict order and regularity, though on a different principle, and was, on the whole, more amused than annoyed. Her pupils were very fond of her, and frequently learned their lessons to please her, when any other motive might have failed to produce this desirable result. From the first Mr. Higginson had approved of her, as "a good, sensible girl, with no nonsense about her," and closer acquaintance only served to confirm this opinion. With Mrs. Higginson she had become even a

greater favourite. She was not half so much afraid of her as of her own daughter. Miss Godfrey, of course, was not nearly so clever as Ethel, for Mrs. Higginson was prone to measure talents by assumption; but though she was proud of her daughter's abilities, they did not—like many of poor Mrs. Higginson's advantages—conduce by any means to her personal comfort. But Helen, she considered, was merely a person like herself, only with the advantage of knowing all the requirements of "society." Lady Page had said so, and what a comfort it was to have her always at hand as a referee in all matters polite! With Ethel Helen did not get on so well as with the rest. At times this young lady would be agreeable, talkative, almost confidential, and she would begin to fancy she must have been unjust to her, when her manner would suddenly change, and Helen felt that she was kept at a dis-

tance, or was looked down on from some imaginary height. Far from despising this contempt like a heroine, or sweetly pardoning it like a saint, it chafed and worried her. Of course she told herself she despised it; but the oftener one tells oneself this sort of thing, there is the more reason to doubt one's perfect conviction of it.

There was one member of the Higginson family whom Helen had not seen—the Reverend Augustus Higginson, an Oxford man and a clergyman. Of him, as was natural, his mother talked a great deal to the governess, after she had installed her in the post of confidante. He was evidently her favourite child, as Ethel was her father's. When at home, he acted as curate to Mr. Bignell, who kept four; but he received merely a nominal salary, his mother hinted. "Perhaps," Helen thought, "this might have been the reason why his duties seemed



to sit on him somewhat lightly." He had spent the Autumn in making a tour of Southern Italy, and was to winter at Rome.

When Helen returned to Belvidere Mansion, after the Christmas holidays, he was still in the city of the Cæsars, or of the popes, whichever association the reader may prefer. Helen, in her aristocratic, evangelical circle, had been accustomed to hear it alluded to by a reference to a name not quite so polite as either of these. Augustus Higginson was to remain in Rome till some weeks after the Carnival, that he might witness some of the Lenten ceremonies; indeed, it was not impossible, his mother said, he might remain over Easter.

"He is very fond of Rome," she said, confidentially, to Helen; "and the people there seem to think a deal of him. He is in the very best society—constantly with Lady Grereton. But, you know, my dear, Hau-

gustus is hexcessively 'ansome. Hall the young ladies 'ere run hafter him, you can't think. Hi think he is very clever, too, though Mr. 'Igginson will have it Hethel is the cleverer."

Mrs. Higginson certainly meant to impress Helen favourably with regard to her son; but in this attempt she utterly failed. Helen pictured him to herself as a sort of masculine edition of Ethel, only sillier. Then he was Mr. Bignell's curate, and, as a rule, Mr. Bignell's curates were an offence to her. They were ritualistic, they were conceited, they were empty-headed—at least, so she imagined. The sillier among the Smokeham girls worshipped them more or less openly, adopted their ideas, and put on that air of exclusiveness which many professedly excellent people seem to consider the proper way of manifesting their devotion to that religion which consists principally in a

feeling of oneness with all human creatures.

Helen was very angry with the curates on account of all this, and did not stop to inquire whether it might not have been wiser to be angry with the young ladies. These they treated with a mixture of patronage and contempt, which was perhaps not quite undeserved, but which enraged her as an insult to her sex, and an altogether unpardonable piece of audacity on the part of any curates whatever. Helen, as a Dean's daughter, had naturally felt that any notice she might take of curates, was rather a condescension than otherwise. Helen Godfrey, to be sure, when in her own proper sphere, was by nature too sweet and gracious ever to seem condescending. The fact that she might have had a slight sense of condescension had probably made her seem only the more gracious and sweet. At Marshborough, all the curates had been

more or less in love with Miss Godfrey. To be favoured with her notice was an object of ambition ; to be supposed to have been privileged to participate in half an hour's flirtation with her, was decidedly a feather in the cap of the handsomest or most eloquent curate in the place.

Here the tables were turned. As she would not worship them, the curates seemed to ignore her existence. She had not even an opportunity of keeping them in their place. But on the whole, it did not much signify, as she very seldom saw them. But to have another objectionable curate added to the number, in the shape of her employer's son, who, in addition to the conceit and frivolity of Ritualism, might possibly have an hereditary flavour of paper-bags, was anything but an alluring prospect to the pride of Helen Godfrey. She was pleased to find he was not to live in the house. His dis-

trict was at the other side of the town, and it altogether answered better for him to have lodgings of his own. Helen resolved to be as little in his company as possible.

It was the end of April when Mr. Augustus Higginson returned. He dined and spent the evening of his return at home, but Helen did not see him. She never dined at table, taking that meal with her pupils at luncheon-time, and generally joining the party after dinner in the drawing-room. But the plea of not intruding on the family group on this first evening of their re-union, served to excuse her on this occasion.

"We are going to have a few friends on Thursday," Mrs. Higginson had answered, gratefully; "and then you will come down and see Augustus."

Helen could not very well say to his mother that she had no desire to see him at

all, but assuredly such was her sentiment.

On all occasions when there was company, Helen would rather have remained upstairs. She despised (very foolishly, it must be confessed) the rich manufacturers and pit-owners who composed the mass of the Higginsons' visitors, probably because she fancied they despised her. But she learned from Mrs. Higginson in the morning that this, though not a numerous, was to be a very select—what Mr. Higginson, senior, called a “swell” party.

“We ’ave been waiting, you see, for Haugustus’s coming ’ome. There is to be Sir Hanthony ’Ayward, member for the borough; Mr. and Mrs. Dean Greylock; Captain Graves, nephew of Lord Wigham—nobody but the first people.”

From this account of the party, Helen fancied it might be less disagreeable than usual.

Rather more hopefully than was her custom, she took up her position in that handsome apartment, the walls of which were so gorgeously illustrated by "the palms and temples of the East."

Among the whole "swell" company assembled that day under the shadow of the Pagoda dominating the household gods of Belvidere Mansion, there was perhaps not a haughtier spirit than that enclosed within the unassuming figure, and speaking out of the shy eyes of the young governess. She had seated herself in one of the windows, partly that she might enjoy the scent of the blossoming shrubs on the lawn.

At last in came the ladies, Mrs. Higginson gorgeous with silk and jewelry, and looking hot and anxious; Ethelind, self-possessed and handsome, simply but richly dressed, and in her liveliest and most gracious mood. The other ladies mostly looked

inanimate and commonplace, and as if they hardly felt themselves at home. But as Ethel rang for coffee, and drew forward easy-chairs, and produced photographs and engravings, making everybody comfortable in body and mind, with the ease and grace of an accomplished hostess, matters began to improve. The dulness, on the whole, was not greater than the normal dulness of that most unsensational interval in the company life of women—the period in the drawing-room before the gentlemen come in.

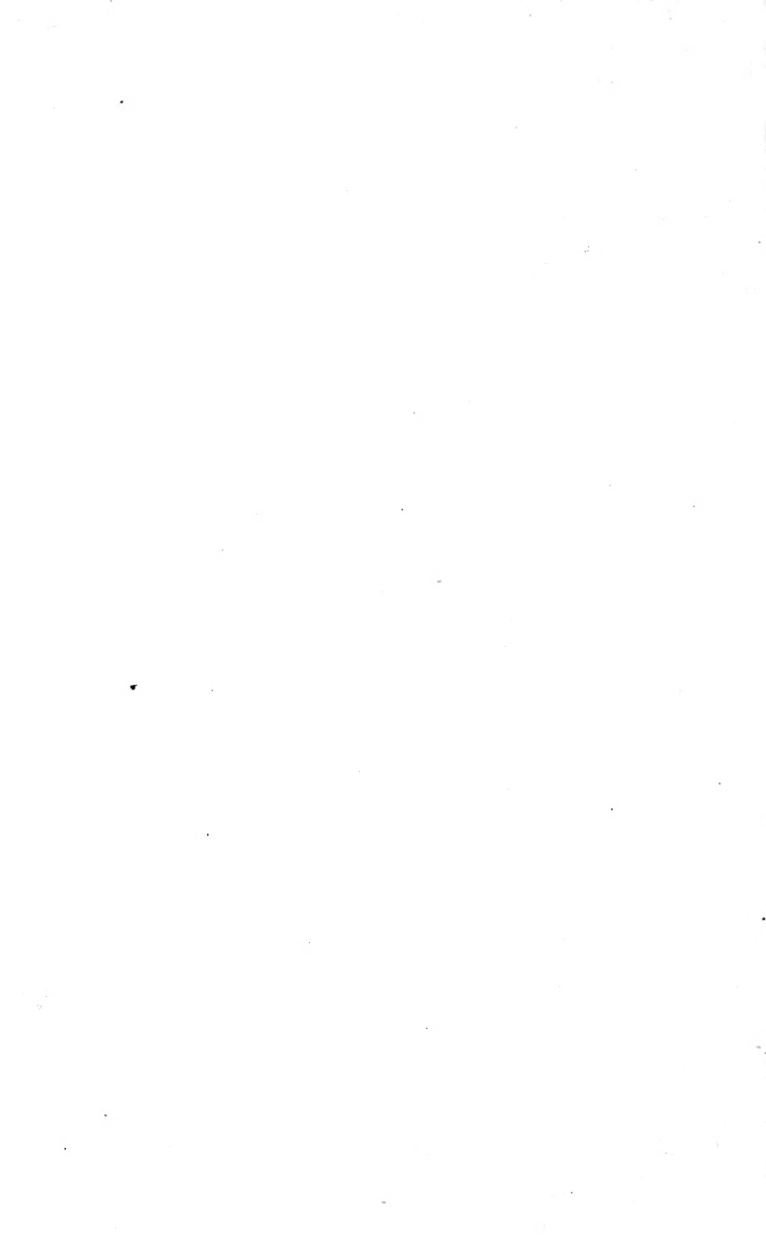
One or two of the ladies spoke to the little girls. No one noticed Helen. She worked at her lace-work more and more industriously, till the light began to fail; then she gazed out on the lawn, and on the Deodoras and Wellingtonias which adorned it. The scent of westeria blossom transported her in spirit to the cottage in the Cathedral Close. Over the black desert



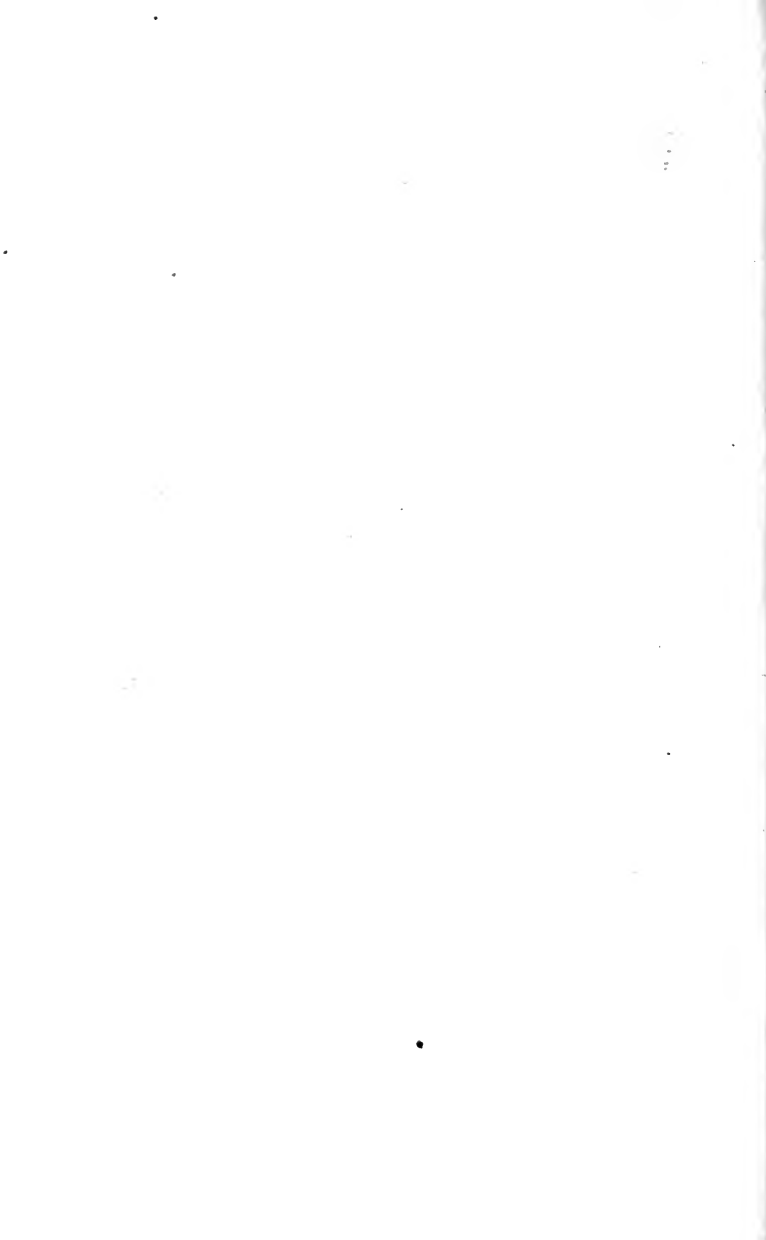
which lay between, she could yet see the tops of the Bloomshire hills, darkly outlined against the pale gold of the western sky. From these summits one could easily see, in the vale beyond, the tower of Marshborough Cathedral.

A sudden attack of the most overpowering home-sickness seized Helen body and soul. Oh! if she could only see a Marshborough face! Here she felt a sort of pariah. It would have been a great relief to run away to her own room and have a good cry alone. But that was impossible. With a strong effort she drove back the rushing tears, and sat staring stonily out on the growing darkness.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.









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